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BARRETT

Grail son

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MONTE CARLO STORIES

BY
JOAN BARRETT



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1896



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
A BIG STAKE	I
A WOMAN'S LIE	18
WHY JOHN GERALD WAS MURDERED	35
ROUGE ET NOIR	50
THE MAN WHO NEVER LOST	64
KISMET	78
'EASILY WON, EASILY LOST'	94
THE MYSTERY OF VILLA FRANCIOSY	110
THE LAST ELEGY	128
HOW DONALD CHARTERIS SAVED HIS WIFE	146

MONTE CARLO STORIES

A BIG STAKE.

PART I.

‘RED loses, colour gains,’ said the *tailleur* in his expressionless, monotonous voice.

‘Ten louis upon red,’ whispered Sainton.

Dolly Emery counted out ten louis from the little pile of gold before her, and feverishly pushed them upon the red diamond. Her dainty purse was quite empty. This long run of black was sweeping away her capital.

‘Red loses, colour gains,’ called the *tailleur* again, and the ten louis were raked in with the rest of the money that had been staked upon red.

‘Oh!’ exclaimed Dolly, in a disappointed tone, and glancing round into Sainton’s thin, sallow face.

He shrugged his narrow shoulders, drawing his black moustache through his long, nervous-looking fingers.

‘Twenty upon red,’ he said. ‘The luck must turn.’

Dolly’s cheeks flamed as she obeyed him. Her heart throbbed excitedly as she watched the *tailleur*

deal out the cards into two rows. The first card was red. But would the upper line of cards be the nearest to thirty, or would it be the lower?

She had not long to wait in uncertainty.

‘Red loses, colour gains,’ said the *tailleur*.

Black had won six times running, and again Miss Emery glanced round despairingly at Sainton.

‘Forty upon the same colour,’ he advised, bending over to see what money she had. ‘You will get it back presently. There can only be a run of seven once in every one hundred and twenty-eight times.’

She looked at the few louis that remained from her little pile, and her face grew very white.

‘I can’t. I have not enough money,’ she murmured, in a scarcely audible tone.

Sainton smiled as he handed her a roll of soiled notes from his pocket-book. The smile disappeared as she shook her head.

‘You must,’ he said. ‘You can never let the bank win your money like that. It’s too easy a victory for it. Treble the amount this time. You are sure to get it again.’

‘I can’t borrow,’ she answered, looking at the notes with greedy eyes. ‘What should I do if I lost?’

‘Borrow again.’

‘The play is made, no one stakes more,’ called the *tailleur*, beginning to deal the cards.

‘It is too late now,’ said Sainton, quietly depositing the notes upon the table in front of Dolly. ‘You would have won back your own money, and a lot more besides, had you taken my advice.’

A tear of angry vexation came into her eyes.

Sainton was right : red won.

‘I am very sorry,’ said Dolly humbly. ‘I—I did not like the idea of playing with your money.’

‘Nonsense ! Stick to the losing colour, and you must win. It was quite impossible that black could keep on winning,’ Sainton declared, with the air of a person thoroughly convinced of the truth of his statement.

Dolly picked up a note ; her fingers were trembling. She had lost every penny of the allowance that her aunt had given her yesterday, and there were six months to be passed before she would receive any more money.

Before her mind flashed a vision of an unpaid bill at a Nice milliner’s, and with that vision came a second one of shabby boots and dowdy dresses.

‘What shall I go upon?’ she asked, picking up another note.

Sainton paused a moment, his keen eyes watching the *tailleur*. Black and red were now winning alternately.

‘Black,’ he answered, ‘and go a lot !’

‘How much ?’

‘A hundred and fifty.’

The impassive-faced croupier gave a glance of interest at Dolly as his rake drew in the notes. Red had won. The play at the trente-et-quarante table was not high that evening, and several people looked curiously at the young Englishwoman who had lost more than anyone present.

‘What shall I do?’ she asked—‘double once more?’

Sainton nodded. The fever of gambling was upon Dolly. It shone in her eyes and flamed in her cheeks. Her face seemed to lose all its youth and softness, and suddenly became hard and old.

‘Gone!’ she cried, with a little hysterical laugh.

‘Shall you ever remember? It was three hundred that time.’

A faded woman, with painted cheeks and darkened eyebrows, raised her head from the contemplation of a card upon which she had pricked down the winning and losing colours. A kindly expression came into her sunken eyes as Dolly’s excited laugh fell upon her ears.

‘My dear,’ she said softly in French, ‘unless you have a system, don’t play. You will lose everything.’

‘Double again,’ Sainton murmured in Dolly’s ear.

She hesitated a moment, regarding the woman mistrustfully.

The voice of the croupier beginning his inevitable cry of ‘The play is made’ made her turn abruptly away and follow Sainton’s advice.

She lost again. The last bank-note had disappeared. Pushing back her chair hastily, she left the table.

Sainton followed her into the ante-room.

‘Mr. Sainton,’ Dolly said in a trembling voice, ‘I have lost all your money!’

‘I know. What of that?’

‘What?’ she repeated excitedly, ‘oh, a great deal. I daren’t ask Aunt Jane for the money. She would be so angry. And my own money, too! I don’t mind having lost that now. I thought it very bad at first, but it is not nearly so dreadful as losing yours. I wish I had never played.’

She was quivering from head to foot. Sainton patted her hand as he drew it through his arm.

‘It is impossible to win all the time. You will have better luck to-morrow.’

‘To-morrow!’ she repeated, with a shudder. ‘Oh, I shall never play again!’

‘That is the cry of a very inexperienced player,’ the man said quietly, leading her through the crowded rooms out into the hall. ‘You must always have faith in the morrow. After a big reverse comes a big slice of luck. Things must equalize themselves.’

Dolly made no reply. Her head ached. The feverish excitement of the last hour or two had parched her mouth, and made her hands feel hot and dry.

‘How much do I owe you?’ she asked abruptly.

Sainton raised his eyebrows, making a protesting gesture with his hand.

‘You lent me one hundred and fifty, and then I doubled. The last stake was six hundred,’ she said.

He nodded carelessly, flicking away a speck of dust from his well-fitting black coat.

‘That makes ten hundred and fifty louis,’ Dolly continued in the same hard, uneven voice. ‘I shall not be able to pay you for a very long time, I am afraid. Oh, Mr. Sainton, I am so sorry!’

‘There is no necessity at all that you should repay me. I mean,’ he hastened to add, as she drew up her head and looked at him in cold astonishment, ‘there is no hurry. I shall feel very self-reproachful if you distress yourself. If it would make you more comfortable, Miss Emery, you can easily settle the affair by writing me an I.O.U. for the amount.’

‘An I.O.U.,’ she repeated, knitting her brows.

‘Yes. You just write I.O.U., and then the sum of money, and our names and the date. Will you come upstairs into the writing-room? I am sure that you will feel more relieved.’

Dolly was not so sure about that. She could not see how any comfort was to be obtained by simply writing down an acknowledgment of her debt. But she followed Sainton up the stairs into the handsome rooms, and there upon the Casino paper she wrote for him at his dictation an I.O.U.

‘I wonder how many other people have used this pad for the same purpose?’ she said.

‘And how many have used it to blot the letters that they have written to their friends, telling them of the big fortunes that they have won here,’ said Sainton cheerfully. ‘One day you will be using it for that purpose.’

‘I shall never play again,’ she declared.

‘Nonsense! I mean to have a try to-morrow afternoon. I have a gambler’s faith in the turning of chances. Black to day foretells red to-morrow, and a run of eight or ten of the same colour means that red and black will soon begin to run very evenly. You

will be just as lucky to-morrow as you have been unlucky to-night.'

Dolly was very quiet as she waited in the hall for her aunt. Miss Emery had gone to the concert. She was a selfish old lady, much given to pitying herself and her weak health, and never so happy as when she was occupied in pouring her troubles into a sympathizing ear. In appearance she was rather massive, and she wore her hair parted in the middle, and brought down in bed-curtain fashion over her temples.

Dolly was her amanuensis, reader, and occasionally her lady's-maid, at a salary of sixty pounds a year. Miss Emery got full value for her money, but she chose to believe that she had conferred a great charity upon her orphaned niece in engaging her as her companion.

She came now from the theatre laden with her programme, scent-bottle, fan, opera-glasses, and handkerchief, all of which she at once transferred to Dolly, whom she had left occupied in answering the weekly correspondence at their hotel.

There were two letters for Dolly and her aunt when they reached their rooms. Both were addressed in a man's hand, and a quick flush of colour stole into Dolly's cheeks as she opened hers. It was from the Rev. Clive Vane, her *fiancé*.

'Oh, aunt!' she cried breathlessly, after reading a few lines.

'I know all about it. The man has written to me,' said Miss Emery discontentedly enough. 'I don't

see why the fact of his having had a living presented to him should make him want to get married at once. It is very thoughtless of him, in my weak state of health, too !'

'We can't be married for three months,' said Dolly softly.

'Of course you will want to buy a wedding-outfit. I can only afford to give you a hundred pounds, Dolly ; you had your allowance yesterday, and you must club the two sums together and make them go as far as you can. A clergyman's wife does not want many smart gowns.'

'Thank you, aunt ; you are very kind,' Dolly murmured. 'I can manage beautifully.'

But could she? From her bedroom window she looked across at the twinkling lights in the Casino, with Sainton's words running in her ears :

'You will be just as lucky to-morrow as you have been unlucky to-night.'

PART II.

'A CONFOUNDED run of ill-luck !' growled Sainton, giving one keen furtive glance at Dolly's face.

She made no reply, watching with unseeing eyes the people passing up and down the hall. Perhaps she was wondering how many sick and aching hearts were hidden by the folds of satin and broadcloth, and how many lips smiled that longed to moan and writhe in pain.

'I made so sure that we should win upon that last

go,' the man continued, smoothing his thin dark cheeks. 'How much did you lose altogether?'

'A hundred pounds of my own money, and twelve hundred francs of yours.'

Dolly was furious with herself for playing. She was angry with Sainton, whose light-hearted philosophy, and probable possession of a long purse, made him indifferent to his losses.

'Oh, a mere bagatelle!' he said, pursing up his lips. 'You were fortunate to get off so easily.'

'I lost all that I had.'

'It is the chance of war,' said Sainton. 'We fight against the bank, and sometimes it is stronger than we. Our turn will come by-and-by.'

'Not mine. I have nothing more to fight with, and I am sick of it! I hate the rooms and the people. If aunt would only go home to-morrow I should be glad.'

Sainton looked at her pale face with the air of a man inspecting a saleable commodity. It was a pretty face, but the cold expression of the man's eyes never changed.

When Dolly had first made his acquaintance at the *table d'hôte* of their hotel, she decided that she liked him very much. He was so different to the other men who paid her compliments, and who were ever seeking opportunities for flirtation. This tall, silent, dark man never changed. His manner was merely friendly, nothing more.

'Do you really mean that you would go away if your aunt were willing to take you?' he asked, still watching her face.

‘Indeed I do! I am afraid to trust myself longer here. The very air of this place seems to incite me to gamble, and the chink, chink of the money brings up all that is grasping and greedy in my character. You don’t know how much I have actually lost,’ she added, lowering her voice to a confidential undertone. ‘Forty pounds of my dress allowance, a hundred that aunt gave me to buy my wedding things with, and—and, besides that, there is that awful amount that I owe you!’

Sainton nodded, without appearing at all impressed. ‘What do you intend to do?’ he asked.

Dolly made a gesture of despair.

‘Oh, I don’t know! I can’t sleep at night for thinking about it. I dare not confess to aunt. She does get so sarcastic about the fools who gamble their money away, and who keep up this great place for the enjoyment of sensible people who never play. I would rather do anything than tell her.’

‘Anything?’ queried Sainton, with an odd light in his sunken eyes.

His tone was so peculiar that she glanced up at him.

‘Yes,’ she declared, with a sigh; ‘anything.’

Sainton bent forward, lightly touching her hand as it lay in her lap.

‘If you are sure of that, I can show you a very simple way out of your difficulty,’ he said, and, as she looked at him interrogatively, he whispered, ‘Marry me!’

Dolly half rose from her seat. His voice was so cold, his face so unimpassioned, that she doubted if

she had heard aright. From her slight experience of a man's manner when he asks a girl to marry him, she knew that Sainton was not looking or speaking like an ordinary man. She pushed back the hair from her forehead, and stared at him in silent astonishment.

'I will make everything comfortable for you,' he said. 'I mean about getting back your money.' The expression of her face warned him that he was not going the right way to work. He tried a fresh method. 'I love you, Dolly,' he added; 'I want you for my wife. I have always loved you. You alone can make a decent fellow of me. Won't you try?'

There was no fervour in his tones. The words were all right, and might have touched the heart of a girl who had never had a proposal made her. But Dolly had not forgotten the earnest, quivering voice of the Rev. Clive Vane, or the tenderness of his eyes. This man was acting a part. He did not love her. She knew that, and Sainton saw that she was not to be deceived.

'I am but a clumsy fellow,' he said, putting his hand to his throat, as though something there prevented him speaking clearly. 'How can I expect you to care for me? I have no command of fine speech, Dolly; I can only repeat that I love you dearly—dearly.'

He spoke quickly now, trying to simulate a passion that refused to be expressed by his cold voice.

Dolly knitted her brows, growing suddenly angry.

Was he simply a chivalrous man, who, seeing that she was worried at the loss of her money and her debt

to himself, had determined to ask her to marry him in order to make things comfortable for her, as he had expressed it? Or had he another reason?

‘You forget that I am engaged to be married,’ she said.

‘To a clergyman,’ Sainton cried, and there was genuine feeling in his voice now. ‘What would his respectable congregation say to their pastor marrying a young lady who had gambled considerably at Monte Carlo? What would he say himself?’

Dolly winced and crimsoned.

‘I am not accountable to Mr. Vane for my actions,’ she said, with dignity.

‘And Miss Emery? What explanation shall you give her for your disposal of the money that she has given you? What will she say when she learns that you have lost it at the tables yonder?’

As if in answer to this question, Miss Emery suddenly appeared from the gambling saloon.

‘Ugh! Those idiots!’ she exclaimed, jerking her head in the direction of the room that she had just quitted. ‘I never go in there without feeling thankful that I have no husband or child to be led astray by the sin of gambling. There is a free concert this afternoon, given from the proceeds of the play that goes on in this place. We sensible people, who are too wise to gamble, get the enjoyment of a fine orchestra and most comfortable seats for nothing at all. Are you coming in, Dolly, or does your head still ache?’

‘I would rather stay here,’ murmured Dolly very miserably, sitting like a criminal before her aunt.

'You look ill ; you had better go home and lie down,' her aunt said, glancing from Dolly's white face to the crowd of people struggling and fighting to enter the theatre and secure good seats. 'I must go, or I shall not find a decent place vacant. Take my advice, Dolly ; your complexion is quite yellow.'

'Well?' queried Sainton, when the rush of people had passed into the theatre, and the hall was almost empty.

'I have answered you ; I love another man,' she replied wearily.

'That is no answer. You will love me in time. I want you far more than the clergyman does. I am not a religious man, Dolly. I need a good girl to keep me straight. You *shall* marry me ! I have never met a girl like you before. You have made me reverence good women.'

He had taken her wrist, forgetful of the few people still remaining in the hall. His face was quivering. He looked eager, anxious, almost despairing, yet there was no love in his fierce regard. Dolly grew alarmed and indignant.

She wrenched her hand away forcibly.

'I will not marry you. You do not love me. I believe that you only want to marry me because of the money.'

'The money? What money?'

'The money that I owe you.'

Sainton's face grew gray. As though conscious of its change of colour, he passed his hand over it.

'I love you,' he repeated, like an obstinate child

who persists in telling an untruth, though quite cognisant of the fact that it is disbelieved. 'I want to marry you because I love you. I have no other reason. Do trust me!'

Dolly rose from her seat. Perhaps, after all, Sainton did love her. He was such a strange man that his mode of proposing might well differ from that of others.

'I cannot marry you,' she answered in a tired tone. 'Let us say no more about it.'

The man drew in his breath with a sharp hiss. He stood up, looking fixedly at her with a queer, intense expression.

'You really mean it?'

Dolly nodded. How very ugly he was! When he frowned, as he was frowning now, he looked quite wicked.

'Very well,' he said, drawing a pocket-book from his coat. 'Then I shall go into the concert-room and place these little papers in Miss Emery's hands. I shall tell her to go to you for an explanation.'

'Oh, no, no! Don't do that! Don't!' Dolly cried, clasping her hands in abject terror. 'You don't know how hard she can be. If you love me, give me a little time. Only a day or two! I must think. You have frightened me so much that I shall cry if I stay here any longer. I am ill! Let me go home and think it over!'

'I must have an answer from you to-morrow,' Sainton said. 'And we must be married at once. I will have no delay.'

She was trembling so much that she was forced to accept his arm. Her limbs seemed too unsteady to bear the weight of her body.

‘To-morrow in the gardens,’ he said, when they parted at the Casino doors.

Pausing to recover her lost strength, Dolly looked back after Sainton’s retreating form. She caught him watching a very beautiful fair woman with a totally different expression in his face. His eyes were full of animation and warm admiration.

‘He has lied to me,’ she thought to herself with a little throb of fear. ‘He does not care for me! What can his reason be for wishing to make me his wife?’

A happy thought occurred to her as she walked home past the pretty winter garden, with its beds of flowering lilacs, and its prim borders of cyclamen and daisies. She would write to an old solicitor, a close friend of her dead mother, and she would beg him to help her, and if possible to save her the necessity of confessing her folly to Miss Emery.

When her letter was written she went to bed, and there she stayed for three days, much to Miss Emery’s concern and Sainton’s anger. Upon the fourth day she ventured downstairs, looking like a fragile white flower in her black gown. Anxiety and remorse had made her really ill.

‘I will give you my answer this afternoon,’ she said to Sainton, hoping earnestly to receive an answer from her mother’s friend that day.

But no letter came, and she prepared herself for the dreaded interview, feeling sick with nervousness and

misery. Sainton was not in the hall when she reached it, but a little, rosy-faced old gentleman came forward to meet her, shaking his head reprovingly at her.

‘Oh!’ Dolly cried, growing even paler. ‘Why did you come? What will aunt say?’

Mr. Thorne took her hands, pressing them warmly.

‘How ill you look, child!’ he said. ‘You have been worrying yourself, I can see. Why have I come? Because I wanted a holiday. I have just seen Miss Emery, and she thinks that I am very wise. Who would stay in foggy London when he could be here—eh?’

Dolly drew out her handkerchief. The tears had sprung into her eyes.

‘How good you are! And I have been so foolish! That horrid man——’

‘He will trouble you no more, the scamp! I have settled with him. Don’t cry, there’s a dear child!’

‘But, but——’ she began.

Mr. Thorne handed her the two I.O.U.’s that she had given Sainton.

‘He is an old acquaintance of mine. I recognised him at once from your description. Of course, he incited you to gamble. He was playing for a big stake, and you, like a foolish child, fell into his trap.’

‘A big stake!’ she repeated wonderingly; ‘I do not understand!’

‘I employed him some years ago as a copying clerk. He came into a small fortune, and left me. But while he was with me, he copied the will of old Miss Stall, your eccentric, miserly friend. She is

dying, by the way, and will be under the ground before you return to England.'

'What has that to do with it?' Dolly asked in bewilderment.

'Everything! It is no breach of confidence now for me to tell you that Miss Stall is a millionaire, and that she has left you a large fortune. Do you understand now why that rascal wanted you to marry him?'

Dolly pressed his hand against her cheek.

'Oh!' she said, with a long-drawn sigh of relief, but the tears in her eyes were happy ones.

A WOMAN'S LIE.

PART I.

THE afternoon pigeon-shooting was in full swing beneath the terrace that faced the Casino at Monte Carlo. Every few minutes the bird flew up from its prison, eager to escape, grateful for that brief glimpse of a blue sky and a sea that was yet more blue, only to fall a few moments later, wounded, fluttering, and dying, upon the short green grass.

The birds continued to rise and fall with sickening monotony. 'The sharp crack, crack, of their slayers' guns was irritating; yet the crowd of fashionably-dressed people gathered upon the terrace seemed to take an almost keen pleasure in listening to the shrill report, and in watching the butchery of the helpless birds.

Nita Vevey stood a little apart from the groups of spectators, and looked at the slaughtered pigeons with eyes that anger had made very bright and hard. Her gloved hands were trembling, and her lips had settled themselves into a stiff line that was almost ugly. A sigh of relief relaxed them, and gave back to them all their habitual sweetness and soft curves, as one bird,

more fortunate than its companions, rose from its box and soared away, owing to some accidental delay upon the part of its would-be murderer.

'Oh!' said Nita, below her breath, and turning to follow the flight of the pigeon, she found that Gervase O'Hara was standing at her elbow.

'Why do you stay here?' he asked bluntly, and with just one keen glance at her face from his deep Irish eyes. 'It only gives you a lot of pain, Mrs. Vevey. Let me take you into the garden.'

Mrs. Vevey hesitated a moment, looking away from the young Irishman's strong features to the shaded garden beyond, where tall palms and sweet-scented roses were growing in luxuriant profusion.

'I think,' she said, without daring to meet his eyes, lest he should read the lie that she was telling in her face, 'I think that it is nicer here.'

'Nicer! Nonsense! You know that every time you hear a shot your heart throbs quicker with pity for those wretched birds. How can it be pleasant for you here? And you have not forgotten yesterday?' he demanded, lowering his voice so that it became audible to her ears alone.

'Yesterday?' Nita repeated. 'No; but if you are kind you will not help me to remember it.'

'But I want you to remember it,' O'Hara persisted. 'You ought not to put yesterday and its events away upon the shelf where you store all the pain and bitterness of previous insults. I want to tell you——'

'Don't you think,' she interrupted very gently, but with a painful flush stealing into her pretty pale cheeks,

‘that we had better say nothing more about yesterday? Every true friend advises forgetfulness. When a woman is placed as I am, it is the only antidote to her misery.’

‘Why should you be miserable?’ he asked. ‘Because you have made a mistake, and have mated with a brute who takes a fiendish pleasure in humiliating and neglecting you, are you to pay the penalty of your girlish error by a life of wretchedness? Must you say good bye to happiness? When I think of it all, I go almost mad with pity for you and with hatred of him.’

‘Hush!’ she said, in an unsteady voice. ‘Oh, hush! Don’t make me pity myself. It—it hurts too much.’

‘Vevey is down there now,’ said O’Hara, pointing scornfully to the tent and the little red flags below. ‘I wonder how many harmless birds he has killed, and whether Mrs. Daljean is watching his prowess.’

Nita drew back from the rail upon which she was leaning. A hard expression came into her eyes, and crept round the corners of her mouth.

‘It is a kind of amusement that would delight Mrs. Daljean,’ she cried bitterly. ‘Let us go into the garden. It is hot here.’

‘The town garden?’ O’Hara questioned. ‘We shall not hear the shooting there.’

Nita assented indifferently. She was swerving from the line of conduct that she had laid down for herself during the wakeful hours of the past night, when it had been so sweet and so cruel to tell herself that Gervase

O'Hara cared more for her than for any other person in the world.

She had decided to treat him distantly, to go so far in repelling his sympathy as to make him withdraw all proffers of friendship. An unmarried man's sympathy is always dangerous to a young and pretty woman who has had the misfortune to marry the wrong man. And it was so patent to all who knew her that she had made a mistake and was now suffering for it.

O'Hara, looking down at her, saw the set lips and the grave eyes. Perhaps he guessed what was passing through her mind as they made their way round the Casino, past the large café, and so into the beautiful gardens, with their fine rows of stately palms and graceful aromatic eucalyptus.

'Shall we sit down?' he asked, selecting a seat that faced a bed of primulas in full blossom, while roses screened it upon either side. 'I must speak to you, Mrs. Vevey. If it is not to-day it will be to-morrow, and if not to-morrow the day after. I can't keep silent any longer. When I think of yesterday——'

'We will not speak of yesterday, if you please,' Nita said. 'How beautiful the flowers are! Does not the look of the sky make you feel sorry for our friends in London, who are probably groping their way in a thick fog at this very moment?'

'I can feel sorry for no one but you,' declared O'Hara, with an impetuous movement. 'Your husband neglects you for a horrible painted flirt, who takes a cruel pleasure in parading her conquest before the eyes of everyone in the place. He forgets that

other men may fall in love with you, Mrs. Vevey ; you must have seen how greatly I——'

'How greatly you pity me? Yes, I have,' Nita interrupted quickly. 'It is kind of you ; but I am one of those people who can never cry in public. Don't you understand,' she cried passionately, 'that a married woman must close her eyes to all her husband's faults if she would be happy, and that the person who seeks to open them is really her enemy? Does it make me the less miserable to think or to talk of Mrs. Daljean? Not a bit. Then be kind, and say no more about her.'

'So be it,' O'Hara said. 'We will drop Mrs. Deljean and speak only of you. Have you ever thought of your future?'

Nita regarded him with vexed eyes and knitted brows.

'What do you mean?' she asked impatiently.

'I mean,' said O'Hara, bending down to look at her face, 'the future that is slowly but surely approaching you, the desolate old age of an unloved wife.'

She shivered a little in the warm sunshine, and drew the loose cape she was wearing closer around her shoulders.

'Unloved!' she repeated, in an unsteady tone. 'Unloved!' A wave of crimson swept over her temples. She moistened her parched lips, and, looking up, met his passion-filled eyes unflinchingly. 'Let me be frank with you,' she said. 'I—I—am not so much to be pitied as—as—you think. I am not unloved.'

She ended the sentence with a little gasp, and wondered if what she had said was very unwomanly. Surely it must be, else why were her pulses throbbing so painfully, and why were her cheeks burning as though she was exposing them to the fiery heat of an open furnace?

O'Hara's face changed suddenly. His eyes became gloomy, and his thin lips twitched nervously.

'So,' he said very quietly, 'there is someone else?'

She nodded, pulling a rose to pieces between her restless fingers.

'And—pardon me if the question pains you—but is this man's affection returned?'

Her hands went up to her face, and the gesture answered him.

'I must ask you another question,' said O'Hara, after a pause. 'Supposing that your husband died, should you marry again?'

She made no answer; but he saw how the red flush dyed the delicate ear that was near him.

'You would marry this person?' he insisted.

'Yes.'

'You believe that he is worthy of your love?'

'Oh yes, yes,' she cried impulsively, with that vivid crimson deepening in her cheeks.

'Good heavens!' he exclaimed bitterly. 'How you must care for him to be willing to repeat the experiment of marriage!'

Nita said nothing. Her head was bowed, and the rose-petals lay upon her lap and at her feet.

'Poor child!' said O'Hara, moved all at once with

tender compassion for the woman at his side. 'You say that you are not to be pitied. I think that you are to be pitied all the more. You are not like the majority of women. Love is no idle plaything to you, and your marriage vows will never be broken except in your heart. If you were different you would be happier.'

The wind just rising and coming to them from the sea caught up the scattered rose-leaves and whirled them away. A little dark cloud began to grow in the sky. Nita shuddered, shrinking still closer to the soft velvet folds of her mantle.

'It is cold,' O'Hara said, rising. 'Shall I take you home?'

She rose from her seat, and in silence walked back with him to the hotel.

He did not know that the tears were creeping into her eyes, nor yet that the foolish lump gathering in her throat prevented her speaking.

She could not trust herself to speak. She had evaded his confession of love, and she had made him jealous. Had she not been so miserable, she could have laughed.

'It is so queer,' she thought, 'so very queer, for a man to be jealous of his own self!'

PART II.

NITA sat in the hall of the Casino, waiting for her husband to join her. A series of international concerts was being held, and her husband had promised

to take her into the concert-room that afternoon. It was growing late, and every now and then Nita glanced anxiously at the clock. The hall was almost empty, save for one cluster of women gathered near the door of the theatre, and a few people scattered about upon the seats.

Had he forgotten both his promise and her? It was only too probable. Arthur Vevey seemed at all times desirous of showing to the world how little he cared for the woman he had married, and how utterly indifferent he was to her pleasures and comfort. Three o'clock! And at the same moment she caught a subdued sound of music. Rising irresolutely, Nita looked at the door of the theatre. Should she go alone, or should she wait a little longer?

As she stood hesitating, a big, large-boned woman, with a florid complexion and an enormous head of gray curled hair, came from the gambling saloon, and, seeing Nita, approached her. In her wake followed a flabby old gentleman, with weak blue eyes, tremulous, babyish mouth, and wearing a very palpable gray toupet that seemed much too small for the broad mass of white forehead it adorned.

'What!' exclaimed the lady, in a loud and hearty voice. 'All alone, Mrs. Vevey? May I borrow your fan a moment? Thanks. It is awfully hot in the other rooms, and the crowds around the tables are really enough to call down the judgment of heaven upon this wicked place. The number of awful people that one sees here is most shocking—most shocking!'

'Mrs. Ray has lost four louis,' said the old gentleman, with a chuckle. 'She always abuses the Casino when she stakes on the wrong number; but when she wins she compares it to paradise.'

'I should not have lost my money if I had not been led astray by some people whom I have no doubt are confederates of the croupiers,' Mrs. Ray complained to Nita. 'These persons repeatedly won upon the first and middle columns of figures, but the moment that I followed their play the last column won. Was it not strange?'

'Very,' said Nita, with the wistful expression deepening in her eyes, and the pathetic droop of her lips accentuated.

'And when I placed my money upon the last column, after seeing those people win four times in succession, would you believe, Mrs. Vevey, that the first column won?'

'Did it, indeed?'

A quarter past three! It was too late now to think of going to the concert. With a sigh Nita dropped her programme upon the polished floor.

'Your husband has had very bad luck lately,' Mrs. Ray said. 'Last night he lost several hundreds of pounds, and Mrs. Daljean won a great deal. It is very curious to notice that whenever Mr. Vevey loses Mrs. Daljean always wins. We have remarked it several times. She has bought a most magnificent sealskin coat since she has been here. I saw her wearing it when she drove away this afternoon with Mr. Vevey. Quite unnecessary to wear such a thing

in this place, where an ordinary jacket is ample protection against the cold.'

Nita turned her head away. She felt afraid lest Mrs. Ray should see the sudden pallor of her face. She knew that she had paled.

'Are you going to the concert?' Mr. Ray asked, his feeble eyes roving over the young woman's black lace gown and long white gloves.

'I was going. I have changed my mind,' Nita replied. A bright flash came into her eyes. Why should she be insulted and neglected in this cruel manner? Why had her husband offered to take her to this concert only to break his promise, and to spend the afternoon with Mrs. Daljean? It was inexcusable. She would submit to it no longer!

Hardly daring to think of what she intended to do, she bowed curtly to Mr. and Mrs. Ray, and, leaving the Casino, crossed to the hotel where she and her husband were staying.

She paused in the hall to ask a servant for a railway-guide, and sat down while the man went in search of the book.

'Oh, it is cruel! cruel! cruel!' She could say nothing else to herself, beating her foot angrily upon the floor.

A mirror opposite reflected her face. It was beautiful now, with those hectic spots of colour burning beneath her dark eyes. She thought of Mrs. Daljean's rounded, childish face, and large, wondering blue eyes, that seemed always to be astonished at everything they saw. If that was the kind of pretti-

ness that pleased Arthur Vevey, how was it possible that he could care for Nita, with her thin features and pale cheeks?

Suddenly she sprang to her feet, every nerve in her body quivering with outraged pride and angry resentment. The outer door had opened, and Mrs. Daljean had entered the hall.

She was wearing the sealskin jacket that Mrs. Ray had mentioned; but the expression of her face was no longer one of proud possession nor yet of amiable babyhood. Her blue eyes were strained and frightened. Her face was ghastly pale, and there were thin streaks in the rouge upon her cheeks. She looked as though she had been crying.

At sight of Nita standing there before her with scorn-filled eyes and curling lip, Mrs. Daljean's distress seemed to deepen.

'Oh, Mrs. Vevey!' she cried, and wrung her hands helplessly. 'Someone else must tell you. I can't.'

'Tell me what?' demanded Nita coldly.

Mrs. Daljean began to sob, mopping her eyes with a tiny fragment of lace-edged muslin. She would have passed Nita, but the younger woman barred the way resolutely.

'Say what you have to tell me,' she commanded. 'Is it anything about my husband?'

Before Mrs. Daljean could reply, a sound of footsteps reached Nita's ears—the sound of men carrying a burden.

Without another word to Mrs. Daljean, Nita turned

to meet the men. She saw that they bore something long upon an improvised stretcher, and that the something was covered with coats.

As she went forward to question them, Mrs. Daljean sprang to her side.

‘No, no, my dear,’ she said impulsively. ‘You mustn’t look at *it*. Take my hand—so ; now let me tell you. Oh, I am not so bad as you think me. Indeed, indeed, I am not. *He* went to gather me a flower—and—and I drove off just for a lark and left him. I wouldn’t have done it had I known. He didn’t call me, and when I found that he didn’t come after me I went back. I thought that he was sulking. And I couldn’t see him anywhere. Then I got frightened. Oh, my dear, don’t look at me like that!’

‘Do you mean,’ said Nita, speaking very harshly and coldly, and drawing her hands away from Mrs. Daljean’s strenuous clasp, ‘that my husband is injured?’

Mrs. Daljean choked down a sob.

‘I called a man to look,’ she whispered, ‘and—and—he must have slipped. They found him lying ever so far below—oh, it was awful!’

She broke off with a shudder. Nita’s merciless eyes never left her poor, disfigured face.

‘You mean that my husband was found lying below?’ she said, still in that harsh tone.

Mrs. Daljean nodded.

‘Lying below—*dead*!’ she whispered.

And as Nita pressed her hands to her temples, as

though suddenly doubting if she had heard aright, a couple of porters came down the stairs laden with luggage.

They passed near the two women, and looked at the stretcher.

'Take it into No. 40,' said one of them in reply to a whispered question. 'It's just empty. We're carrying Mr. O'Hara's luggage over to the Hôtel de Paris.'

* * * * *

It was wrong, it was heartless and unwomanly of her, this inability to think of no one but *him* as she sat alone. For the dead man in the darkened room at the end of the corridor she had no feeling. She told herself that she was sorry for him. It was horrible to die when one was so young and so fond of life.

'He never cared for me,' she said excusingly to herself. 'I cannot cry because he is dead. He never loved me.'

It was someone else who occupied every thought — the man in whose room *it* lay.

'Will he come to me? Will he write, or shall I never see him again?' she asked herself as the dressmaker unfolded her samples of mourning materials, and produced tape measures and pencil.

'Oh, anything will do—anything!' she cried impatiently to the meekly insistent woman. 'I do not mind what you make, or how you make it. Go away, and leave me alone.'

And the dressmaker, mistaking Nita's petulance

for the result of her grief, went away and told sympathizing outsiders how deeply the young English lady must have loved the dead man.

‘He will surely write,’ thought Nita, as the days passed away. But though she received visits and letters of condolence from every person of her acquaintance, Gervase O’Hara held aloof.

She knew that he was still at the Hôtel de Paris. She had ascertained that in the unobtrusive way with which a woman never fails to discover anything of importance to herself. When a week had gone and room No. 40 was again empty, Nita took a bold resolution. She would go to Gervase. After all, she said to herself as she tied the strings of her little black bonnet before the glass, she could not expect him to come to her. She had led him to believe that she loved and was beloved by another man. She had made him jealous. But he loved her. Oh, she was certain of that! and what was it just to go to him and say:

‘It is you I love. I deceived you because there was nothing else for me to do.’

Was there anything in that so very unwomanly? She told herself that there was not, and yet her knees trembled as she waited in the private salon of his hotel. Her lips were dry. She felt that when the door opened she must run away. She could not face him. She could never stammer what she had come to say. The door swung back, and he came into the room at last. His face was very pale, she thought, and she noticed that his lips were twitching.

'I—I—came to tell you,' Nita began tremulously, 'that—that——'

She broke down. Never, never could she undeceive him while he looked at her with those cold, stern eyes.

'That you are going away, and have come to wish me good-bye?' said O'Hara quietly. 'It was kind of you to remember me. Good-bye, Mrs. Vevey. May the future bring you all happiness!'

He had just touched her hand, and now he was glancing at his watch. The words froze upon Nita's lips.

'I must appear very boorish, I fear,' he said. 'But I must beg you to accept my excuses. I have a very important engagement. Are you leaving to-day?'

'No. I—I—oh, we can't part like this! I came to tell you that there never was anyone else—I deceived you—what else could I do?—I dared not let you speak then!'

'*There never was anyone else!*' he repeated in tones that thrilled her. '*There never was anyone else!* Do you mean it?'

'Yes, yes!' she cried, clinging to his hand, smiles and tears upon her face. 'Oh, it *was* so hard to speak!'

He pushed her almost roughly away, and searched her face with eyes whose expression of horror and misery chilled her.

'You—you heard me mention an engagement that I have to keep,' he said rudely. 'It is with the lady whom I hope to marry. I should have spoken to

you of her before, but—but I could never bring myself to do so. You understand, Mrs. Vevey? I must seem a brute to you.'

She had grown very white, and her face seemed to have become strangely sharp and hollow; but at these words a flood of crimson dyed her cheeks.

'You mean,' she said, catching her breath convulsively, 'that—that you were merely amusing yourself with me. Is it so?'

He nodded his head, never once meeting her eyes, as though he felt too ashamed to encounter their scornful light.

'And I come to you and almost ask you to marry me,' she continued. 'How amused you must feel! What a simpleton I must seem to you! It is all very ridiculous, is it not? I can almost laugh at my own folly.'

'For pity's sake——' began O'Hara, taking an impulsive step towards her.

Nita waved him away, quivering with indignation.

'I thought,' she said with a pitiful little gasp, 'that I had learnt all that a woman could be taught of the utter faithlessness and unworthiness of men; you have shown me my error. I—I—hope that we may never meet again.'

He heard the rustle of her dress as she went from the room, and he knew that she stumbled once. Were her eyes blinded with tears—those pretty eyes that he would have given the world to have kissed?

He went to the window and watched the slight, black-clad figure until it disappeared from sight.

‘Oh, Heaven!’ muttered O’Hara, clutching his hands in impotent anger. ‘If only I had known! Better far that she thinks me faithless and a brute, and that her love for me should die with the shock, than that she should know how, hoping to give her happiness with the man I thought she loved, *I killed her husband!*’

WHY JOHN GERALD WAS MURDERED.

PART I.

To see them together, no one in the world would have thought them to be father and daughter. She was very tall, with a pretty rounded figure, a most charming little face, that looked honest and good, besides being extremely attractive, and a great mass of reddish-brown hair, that she wore twisted in a loose coil upon the nape of her white neck.

The women at my hotel—whose name for certain reasons I shall refrain from giving—said that she dressed in good taste. I am a poor judge where women's clothes are concerned, for I am unable to tell stuff that cost its wearer sixpence a yard from material whose value is just as many shillings. But I *did* admire Bertha Gerald in everything that she wore. She always seemed to stand out from the other women, and to have a quiet, elegant distinction that they all lacked somehow.

But old John Gerald! Well, however he came to have such a charming and pretty daughter was a mystery. I suppose Miss Gerald resembled her dead mother, for, as I have already said, she was not a bit

36 WHY JOHN GERALD WAS MURDERED

like her father, although he was just as remarkable in his way as she was in hers.

He was a thin, spare little man, with rounded shoulders and misshapen legs. His face was very white, and the skin full of deep wrinkles. He had a good forehead, a nose just a bit inclined to be hooked, and the biggest, queerest chin that I had ever set eyes upon.

His great passion was gambling. Every afternoon found him waiting for the Casino to open, and he never left it until the closing hour. I have often stood behind his chair and watched him planking bank-notes, louis, and five-franc pieces upon so many different numbers that it was a marvel to me how he could ever remember where he had placed all his stakes. He had a peculiar habit of setting his teeth together and working his mouth backwards and forwards while he was staking his money that rather added to his grotesque appearance. I noticed that whenever he had finished placing his stakes upon the green cloth, his long, nervous-looking hands began to tremble, and his little red-brown eyes never once left the table while the ball was spinning merrily round, and the croupiers were calling : 'Rien ne va plus !'

People used to envy his good luck. They called him 'Wells the Second' in the hotel, and we all felt proud that we knew him. Day after day, and night after night, he won, and I never saw him smile or betray any pleasure or excitement when he got his bank-notes and louis trebled, or yet when a single number won, as it frequently did when old Gerald had

backed it, and he was given just thirty-six times as much as he had staked.

Miss Gerald would sometimes stand and watch her father, with her dark brows knitted and her lips compressed as though it gave her pain to see him winning, and to hear the murmurs of envy and admiration that arose from the people around him. She couldn't bear the gambling-rooms, and generally sat in the Atrium, watching the people as they strolled about, or passed into the theatre. And when her father came out just before eleven, with his impressive face and shuffling walk, she would lay her hand upon his arm and ask, in a voice that seemed to me to be the prettiest in the world :

‘Aren't you tired, dad dear?’

Old Gerald used to pat her hand, and then remove it, and begin to turn over a few papers, upon which he made figures and observations while he was playing ; and so they would walk out of the Casino, the man anxiously studying his notes, and the girl walking by his side, looking over his shoulder, with that pained expression deepening in her sweet face. We didn't know much about them at the hotel. Little Bill Malkinson, who came to the Riviera every year, and who professed to be acquainted with everybody and all that concerned new-comers, declared that Mr. Gerald had been a horse-trainer at Epsom, that he had married a lady of high birth, and had gambled away every penny of her fortune.

Certainly this was Gerald's first season at Monte Carlo. Miss Gerald had told me so during one of our conversations together.

Several people at the Casino who watched Gerald win continually tried to gain his confidence, and to get him to tell them what his system of play was. But he would never meet their advances, and he shunned strangers. At meal-times he was just as reserved and taciturn. One only had to speak of the Casino before him, and his face would instantly assume its mask-like expression, and not a word would he contribute to the conversation.

In the morning, before the Casino opened, he sat in his room, or went alone for a walk. It was very seldom that Miss Gerald accompanied him.

One very lovely morning in the latter part of January I had made arrangements for driving Miss Gerald to Nice. She had some friends there whom she was anxious to visit.

The drive along the lower road to Nice is one of the most charming in the world. All the way one never loses sight of the sea, and there are exquisite little bays, jutting promontories, and a view that is continually changing and charming on one side, while upon the other there are high, dark pine-woods, banks of tall rocks, a picturesque village or two perched up well out of the way of those old-time depredators—the Barbary pirates, gushing waterfalls, bushy bits of swampy ground, where handsome reeds flourish, and dark, damp rocky crevices filled with great clusters of fine maiden-hair fern. It is a beautiful walk or drive, and the morning that we had chosen was a part of one of those days when you find yourself pitying the dead, and experience a jubilant joy in living.

The sea was a deep sapphire blue, with a milky thread of colour here and there, and the sails of the boats looked for all the world like large white-winged sea-birds resting after a long flight.

I watched the pink colour deepening in Miss Gerald's face as her eyes drank in the beauty of our surroundings. She had been very silent for some time, and I, falling in with her mood, had not spoken, except to call her attention to a creeper, whose clusters of yellow flowers hung like grapes from a tree it had selected to cover, a clump of ferns, or a more than usually beautiful bit of scenery.

I suppose it was the morning, the brilliant sunshine, and my companion's close proximity, that helped to quicken the beat of my pulses, and that stirred my veins like the working of a love-philter. For all at once I found myself attempting to tell Miss Gerald that I loved her, and that the one thing I desired in the world was to call her my wife.

I had only stammered a few words before she stopped me.

'Oh, hush!' she said earnestly. 'Let me tell you about myself. I have often wanted to. You have been so kind to me, Mr. Deverill, that it seems a very poor return for your goodness to me not to take you into my confidence. Have you ever wondered why papa plays so much at the Casino?'

'Wondered! no. I merely thought that it was for amusement.

'It is for me,' said she, with quivering lips, and turning her face full upon me. 'My mother's fortune

has all been lost in speculations. Papa used to be an inventor, and he was always bringing out something very wonderful that, somehow or other, was never a success. And so our money went away, lump by lump, and bit by bit, until we had very little left. My father had a friend who came to Monte Carlo a year or two ago. He won a great deal of money, and—and—papa thought that he could win as much—and perhaps more.'

'I see,' I said, wondering what this confidence had to do with her desire that I should not speak to her concerning my love.

'Yes, but'—she added, playing with the silk fringe of her sunshade—'but there is another reason for his anxiety to win a lot of money. When we were rich people, I was engaged to marry somebody, and when we became so poor that papa could not give me a dowry, Paul's father refused his consent to our marriage, and papa thinks that if he can succeed in recovering my fortune, Paul's people will—well, will withdraw their objections to my entering their family,' said she, flushing from her chin to her temples.

'I see,' I murmured again.

'But you can't think what pain it gives me, Mr. Deverill,' she cried impulsively. 'It hurts me so much to see papa sitting in that dreadful place day after day, and to feel that every penny he wins has been lost by someone else. There was a little widow at the same table with him yesterday. She was in deep mourning and very poorly dressed. She kept losing,

and, oh! I couldn't bear to see the hungry look in her poor eyes when the croupier pushed piles of gold and silver across to papa while her own money was raked away. I thought to myself that very likely she also was trying to win money for someone dear to her—a little child, maybe. How could I ever accept happiness that was bought me with such money! I feel so choked when I—I—think about it all.'

'But people *must* lose,' I remonstrated feebly. 'It isn't Mr. Gerald's fault if he wins. Everybody sits down to the table with the same chances before him or her.'

She sighed, and looked away at the sea with very wistful eyes.

'It seems so stupid to be greedy for money in such a place as this,' she said, after a little pause. 'I feel very often that I should be content with a plate of macaroni and a few figs if I could live here. One's ambitions seem to dwindle away until they become very small when one is out in this glorious sunshine.'

'But the rainy days wake them up again,' I cried. 'And one would grow tired of figs and macaroni—especially if one had to eat them alone.'

'Ah, yes,' said Miss Gerald. 'But to think of papa walking with blind eyes down this road, seeing nothing whatever of the beauty around him, and absorbed with that one idea of winning a fortune for me! I have tried to make him understand that I do not want it, that it pains me; that I would prefer to earn my own living, and attempt to make my own way in the world. But I can do nothing. He feels

it his duty, I am afraid, to close his ears to my entreaties. Poor papa !

My admiration had increased for her. I understood now why she looked so sad when she stood at her father's side in the Casino.

'Papa thinks of nothing else,' she continued, with a tremor in her voice. 'He used to like me to read and play to him once, and we always went for walks together. But now he wants to be alone all the time. He has gone somewhere for a walk this morning.'

We had reached the first tunnel that has been cut in the rock as she spoke, and I was driving quickly through it, Miss Gerald holding her sunshade above her head to ward off the drops of water that were falling from the roof, when all at once she gave a cry, and caught my arm.

'Look !' she said breathlessly. 'There is something huddled up at the side of the wall. Is it a man ?'

I looked in the direction she indicated, and I must have pulled the reins when she touched my arm, for the horse stopped right in front of the body of a man that lay close to the wall. I only had time to observe that the face was hidden, and that the ragged clothing looked like the garments of a tramp, when Miss Gerald began to scramble out of the trap.

'Don't go near it !' I cried, trying to stop her. The very position of the body told me at once that no person could lie asleep in that attitude, and that consequently the man was dead. 'You can do nothing for him, Miss Gerald. It is unwise——'

I said no more. She gave me one look in which I

read honest contempt, and a determination to see for herself if the man was past aid or not, and was out of the trap and bending over the motionless form in a moment.

I heard her give but one choked cry, and saw her tearing away at the man's collar. Before I was at her side she said in a dazed, bewildered manner :

'It is papa. Oh, do come !'

PART II.

ANY other girl but Bertha Gerald would have fainted away, or screamed, or have done something equally foolish and troublesome. But she sat and held poor old Gerald's head upon her lap, while I filled my cap with water from the spring that ran by the side of the road, and bathed his face with it. She rubbed his hands, and called to him, but no sound came from his blue lips, and when I placed my hand upon his heart I could feel no throbbing.

His face was cut and bruised dreadfully, and I noticed that a ring was gone from his little finger, and the diamond pin from his tie. He had no coat on, and his shirt and waistcoat were ripped in rags.

'I am afraid,' I said, looking up at the girl's white, set face, 'that we can do no good, Miss Gerald.'

A tear ran down her cheeks, and splashed upon the dead man's gray hair. Her voice was a little tremulous when she spoke.

'Will you fetch assistance, Mr. Deverill? You are sure to meet someone upon the road. A doctor first of all, please. I will nurse him like this until you return.'

44 WHY JOHN GERALD WAS MURDERED

I jumped up into the trap, and away the mare went as she had not gone upon her journey from Monte Carlo. Before I had got very far, I met a cabman driving an empty fly, and I sent him off for the police. I got a doctor at Monaco, and back we went to the tunnel, where we found my dear girl still holding the dead man's head upon her knees, and still rubbing his cold hands, and begging him to speak to her.

And after the doctor had said that he could do nothing for the poor old fellow, and the police had inspected the body, its position, etc., they lifted him gently into the cab, and, covering his face with his daughter's little handkerchief, they took him back to the hotel.

Miss Gerald did not cry. I would rather that she had. The tearless fixity of her eyes was painful to see. And when we reached the hotel, and the women began to crowd around her, crying and making as much fuss as though they had lost their own fathers, she drew herself quietly away from their clinging hands, and in a hard voice begged to be excused. She wanted to go to her room.

'She is like a stone,' somebody said, when the poor girl had disappeared up the broad staircase.

Well, the doctors agreed that John Gerald had been murdered, and the police declared that the motive was robbery. All the jewellery that he was in the habit of wearing had been taken from his person, and his pockets were empty. Why the murderers had taken his coat was a mystery. I could only suppose that they had suspected him of conceal-

ing bank-notes between the linings, and that they had taken the coat to unrip and examine it at leisure.

The queer part of the affair was how the assailants of John Gerald had found time to rob and kill him upon a road so much frequented as this one was. The papers of Mentone, Nice, and Monte Carlo said as little as possible about the affair. Some of them took no notice whatever of it.

The day after Gerald's funeral I was standing in the hall, wondering if Miss Gerald would return to England, and if 'Paul' would still be such a weak cad as to allow himself to be influenced by mercenary considerations, when one of the visitors came to me in a breathless state of excitement, and told me that Miss Gerald had gone quietly away. The hotel proprietor had taken her to the station, and she had got into a train for Marseilles. She had not wished anybody good-bye.

I felt a bit cut up at this, although I told myself that I had no reason to feel neglected nor wounded. Miss Gerald was quite free to treat me with indifference. I had only been a passing acquaintance, and must I not be always associated in her mind with a most terrible event—that of the finding of her father's murdered body?

Yet the pain rankled all the same. I should have liked to have held her hand, and to have looked into her eyes just once more. I became dull and morose, and I envied 'Paul' with a bitter envy that was almost akin to hatred.

The days passed on. A few arrests were made of

suspected persons; but there was not sufficient evidence against any one of them, and they were discharged.

One evening, about six weeks later, I went into the Casino, and strolled about the gambling saloons. I had not entered them for some time. The eternal chinking of money, the *frou-frou* of silk gowns, and the painted faces of the women, filled me with a curious feeling of repugnance. I sat down on the centre seat of the first room, and looked at the four large tables, at the queer collection of people gathered around them, almost all heated with the passionate desire to make a fortune easily and quickly, nearly everyone greedy for money, eager to obtain possession of the wealth that had caused John Gerald to lose his life. I wondered if the persons or person who had killed him were there that night, trying to gain a big fortune with the money that they had stolen from him. For I believed, as did everyone else, that his murderers were people who had watched him daily, and who had followed him when he started for that fatal walk with the intention of killing him when an opportunity occurred.

As my eyes wandered round a table, they suddenly fell upon an old lady, who leant upon a black stick, watching the players at the table John Gerald had frequented. She was a timid woman, evidently, for she seemed to ponder long and deeply before she staked a five-franc piece, and she continually followed the play of a smug-faced Englishman with a prim little wife, who were sitting side by side.

Something about the old lady seemed familiar to me, though I could not remember having met her anywhere. Her face was deeply lined, and she wore her gray hair in little curls. A pair of blue glasses concealed her eyes.

I should not have felt so interested in her had I not observed one thing. And that was the frequency with which she looked at me. And all at once, while I was staring at her, and trying to extract from my unwilling memory what it was in her face that I knew, she bent forward and snatched something from the hands of the Englishman, whose play she had been so carefully watching. There was a sudden commotion at the table. The play was stopped. A clamour of excited voices arose. Crowds began to press round the croupiers and the question passed from lip to lip : 'What is it ?'

In the midst of the hubbub I saw two quiet-looking men place themselves upon each side of the Englishman, while two more surrounded the woman. A cry of 'Cheats !' 'Thieves !' rang out from the lips of some of the people, and the excitement deepened. Following with the mob that surged after the two captives as they were led from the rooms down the entrance-steps, I saw them dragged into a couple of closed cabs. As I stood looking after them, I felt a gentle touch upon my arm, and, turning, I saw the old lady with the gray curls and the blue spectacles. She smiled, and, removing her glasses, I recognised her at once as Bertha Gerald.

'You !' I exclaimed in amazement. 'And those people ?'

48 WHY JOHN GERALD WAS MURDERED

‘I have reason to believe,’ she answered, ‘that, if not actually guilty of taking my father’s life, they know those who did.’

* * * * *

So it turned out. Bertha made a clean confession to me later on. Her father had known an old friend who had constructed an elaborate scheme for breaking the bank at Monte Carlo. Whether he would have eventually succeeded can never be told. But he gained enormously, and when he was dying he gave to John Gerald certain diagrams and papers which explained his system of play. Bertha knew that her father carried these documents about with him. He could not have played for two consecutive nights without consulting them, as the play varied each day, according to his gains and losses. She knew also that this old friend had made a half-confidence to his nephew, and had at first intended to bequeath his system to him.

Her suspicions at once fell upon this nephew and his wife, who were staying at Nice. She communicated with the police, pretended to leave Monte Carlo, and watched every day at the Casino in various disguises. The night of the capture she had seen the Englishman draw a paper from his pocket that she at once recognised as belonging to her father.

‘But,’ I asked, ‘what made you think that the motive was other than that of mere robbery?’

‘Because my father’s watch, ring and pin were found in a garden close by the tunnel,’ she replied. ‘No, of course you did not know. They are always

so anxious to stifle curiosity about such events here, that the newspapers say as little about them as they possibly can.'

Bertha did not marry that hateful Paul after all.

There came a day in our lives when she made me a very naïve confession, to the effect that her love for that young gentleman had died a hasty death when she found out that he was not strong enough to hold and keep her in defiance of his mercenary father.

'I used to tell poor dad so,' she said, blushing very much, 'but he would never believe me. He thought it was only my pride that had suffered, and not my heart.'

So she married me, and we never go to the Riviera. And when enthusiastic people wax eloquent over the beauty of the Corniche road, between Nice and Monte Carlo, my wife creeps away like a timid mouse, and I say so little in response that the enthusiastic individual speedily quiets down and is heard no more.

ROUGE ET NOIR.

PART I.

‘YES, dear, it was simply awful ! I don’t know when I have suffered so much in all my life. Eric made no attempt to deny his infatuation for this — this *creature*, and he wanted to write at once to poor Muriel and ask her for his freedom. Did you ever hear of such shameless conduct ? And Eric, *my* boy, to behave like this !’

There were tears of wounded pride and bitter anger in Lady Hartley’s voice. Her thin lips quivered, and a bright flush mounted into her delicate cheeks.

Pretty little Mrs. Swayne looked at her with a pity that was partly curiosity.

‘Eric is a gentleman,’ she said, in her bright, eager way. ‘He cannot jilt Muriel. It is impossible.’

‘Oh, my dear !’ Lady Hartley cried despairingly, ‘nothing in the whole world is impossible to a man who believes himself to be in love ! If you had heard Eric talk, you would really have thought that he was proud of his resolve to write and tell his miserable story to Muriel. He actually declared that he would be acting unfairly towards Muriel if he kept his

promise to marry her. And when I pointed out what a cruel shock it would be to her, and how all our friends would cry out against his conduct, he coolly said that it would be far better for Muriel in the end, and that he could stand any amount of abuse, if he felt that he had followed the dictates of his conscience. When you are trying to point out to a man the evil results of his proposed folly, and he begins to drag his conscience into the argument, what can you do ?'

Mrs. Swayne lay back in her rocking-chair, and fixed her brown eyes upon the waving palms in front of her.

'Of course, he does not intend to marry her—this person, I mean,' she said, slowly, and without daring to look at her friend's face.

'But he does. That is the worst part of the entire affair. He says that she has never had a chance, and that everybody has always been down upon her, and that he intends to raise her to the level of other women. I tried to show him that it was rather hard upon Muriel that she should be sacrificed as a preliminary step towards his quixotic attempt at reforming this woman, but I could do nothing with him—nothing at all !'

'I wonder,' said Mrs. Swayne musingly, 'what she is like.'

Lady Hartley took no notice of this truly feminine remark. Like most people in trouble, she merely desired a patient audience.

'I persuaded him not to write to Muriel to-day. I begged him to wait, if only for twenty-four hours.

I don't know why I did. I feel confident that I shall gain nothing by it. Only I felt that I wanted to stave off the blow to Muriel as long as I possibly could. Look, Mary,' she added, with a tear running down her face. 'I took the dear child's last portrait to show him, and—and—he said: "Good gracious! How *fat* she has grown!" Was it not brutal of him?'

Mrs. Swayne stretched out her hand for the photograph.

'The other girl must be very slim,' she thought. Aloud, she said, commiseratingly: 'Poor Muriel! What a shame! And she has got on that sweet gown from Paris! How well her hair is dressed! She must have got a new maid!'

'When Eric said that,' continued Lady Hartley, 'I felt that there was no longer any hope of winning back his love for Muriel. No man can be in love with a woman and call her fat. If Eric had used the word "plump," I should have thought that there was still a little room for hope. I can only try now to prevent this marriage.'

'I wish I could help you, dear Lady Hartley,' Mrs. Swayne said, with a soft sigh. 'Nobody can be fonder of Eric than I am. He is the best dancer of my acquaintance, and he is simply invaluable in a country house. What a talent he has for getting up theatricals and bazaars! To think that we shall lose him; for, I suppose, you will not receive his wife?'

'I shall never acknowledge that person, should my son marry her!' Lady Hartley cried, with such a warm flush of indignation that the tears ceased to

run down her cheeks. 'He actually asked me to be kind to her. He wanted me to call upon her!'

'Ah! and why don't you?'

Lady Hartley raised her head, and looked at Mrs. Swayne without speaking. She appeared too amazed to speak. Mrs. Swayne smiled a little, and added eagerly :

'Yes, I mean it. Call upon her. Offer her money. You can afford to buy Eric's freedom. Those people will do anything for money, I believe. You can try, anyhow.'

'Mary,' Lady Hartley said, with hope in her voice, 'you are a treasure. There is something in your idea. If I can only prove to Eric that this woman is marrying him solely for his position and wealth, the betrayal of her cupidity must turn his heart back to poor Muriel.'

'It may,' Mrs. Swayne replied dubiously, as she returned the photograph to Lady Hartley. 'It will be a great thing if you can save him. What is this girl's name, and where does she live?'

Lady Hartley made a wry face.

'She lives at the other end of Mentone,' she answered—'somewhere near the Central Casino. Eric calls her Mademoiselle Alibert, but I am told by other people that she is commonly known to her friends by the name of Lulu—that alone tells one what she is.'

Lady Hartley's pulses beat a little more quickly than usual when she stood outside the door of Mademoiselle Alibert's flat, waiting for an answer to her somewhat nervous ring.

It was quite a shock to her when a clean old Frenchwoman, in a spotless cap and large frilled apron, opened the door. The servant's face was rosy and pleasant. She looked kind and honest. Her eyes lingered wonderingly upon Lady Hartley's delicate features, and then wandered over the lady's rich but quiet dress, while Lady Hartley was asking if Mademoiselle Alibert was at home, and could she see her?

Oh yes, mademoiselle was at home. And no doubt the lady could see her. Would madame give her card?

'No,' said Lady Hartley, dreading lest the girl should refuse to see her when she knew that her visitor was Eric's mother. 'It is not necessary.'

She waited a moment in a small passage, uncarpeted, chairless, and dark, until the servant, again appearing, ushered her into a large salon, gaudily furnished, and only redeemed from absolute vulgarity by the large quantity of beautiful flowers on the tables and in the corners.

A slight, dark-eyed girl rose from a sofa, and came forward eagerly to meet Lady Hartley. The visitor noticed her pink silk tea-gown, her tiny feet and bejewelled hands, and lastly the pale small face that was both pretty and refined.

A suspicion of powder upon the temples and chin, perhaps even a faint touch of rouge beneath those melancholy but lovely dark eyes, almost escaped Lady Hartley's notice. The girl looked like a lady. There was nothing pronounced or common in her appearance, though, to be sure, the pink silk tea gown, with

its soft ruchings of yellow lace, rather told against her. She wore a great many diamonds also—too many, in fact. They glittered upon the broad band of black velvet that clasped her throat, they shone in her ears, in the comb at the back of her head, upon her long fingers, and peeped out from the folds of her gown as she crossed the room, the somewhat short skirt displaying a dainty buckled shoe and a small piece of an open-work silk stocking.

‘Oh!’ she exclaimed, stopping suddenly in the middle of the room, and throwing out her hands with a babyish gesture of disappointment. ‘You are not Madame Fortuna, the fortune-teller!’

Lady Hartley drew herself up. She felt antagonistical. This girl’s evident youth, her prettiness, her costly dress, all helped to harden the heart of Eric’s mother. And then her appearance was so French! She felt vexed because Mademoiselle Alibert was not vulgar-looking, was not a trifle *passée*, and had used art so slightly in enhancing her good looks that, instead of offending the eye, it actually pleased it.

‘I am Lady Hartley,’ she said stiffly. ‘My son has spoken of you to me. I wish to make you a proposal.’

Mademoiselle Alibert raised her eyebrows. The elder woman’s drawn lips, cold stare, and severe face told her that Eric’s mother had not called upon her with friendly intent.

Ceremoniously offering Lady Hartley a chair, Lulu took another facing her visitor, and, folding her hands in her lap, quietly waited.

‘My son,’ began Lady Hartley, in a clear, hard voice, ‘told me yesterday that he intended to marry you.’

She paused. Lulu was smiling.

‘He has told me the same thing also, madame,’ she said simply.

‘You have accepted him?’ Lady Hartley continued in the same accusatory manner.

Lulu nodded.

‘Certainly,’ she replied, with animation. ‘Why should I refuse him? I am very fond of him. I shall make him just as good a wife as any other woman.’

‘Do you know that my son is entirely dependent upon me?’ asked Lady Hartley, ‘and that I shall withdraw the allowance I now make him if he marries you?’

‘Oh, we know that you will do that,’ Lulu said. ‘Eric is going to work, and I shall give lessons in French and Italian. We shall not starve.’

‘*You* give lessons!’ Lady Hartley cried contemptuously. ‘Have you ever worked in your life? Do you suppose that when you marry Eric you can dress yourself as you are dressed now? How can you endure poverty? You cannot have thought the matter over!’

She had not intended to be so rude. But the girl’s calm, assured manner irritated her. The very perfume that came occasionally from her clothing set Lady Hartley’s teeth on edge.

A flush of anger swept over Lulu’s face. She had writhed in silence under Lady Hartley’s speech and insulting manner, but this last accusation broke down her self-control.

‘Have I not thought the matter over!’ she cried passionately. ‘What does it matter to you whether I have or not? I do not mind poverty. I would rather marry Eric and starve than live as I have lived in the past. Oh, you don’t understand, you women who call yourselves good! You always seem to think that life for us is all wine and honey. You little know. And now you would take away my only chance of salvation! What am I to do if I give Eric up?’ She broke into a laugh. ‘But we are talking very foolishly,’ she said, putting her hands before her eyes as though to shut out some vision that her own words had brought before her. ‘Why should I give Eric up? We love each other. I tell you that I shall make Eric a good wife. Why should I not?’

‘Because you have not the power to make my son respect you,’ Lady Hartley replied. ‘You cannot do away with your past. Eric will not be able to forget it. When he loses position and friends, and finds himself alone with poverty and you, he will cease to love you. He must. My son has never been accustomed to deny himself any luxury. You say that you do not mind poverty. Probably you have at one time endured it, and therefore it would not seem so terrible to you as it will to him. Come,’ she added, changing her tone, and adopting a business-like air, ‘what sum of money shall I give you to set Eric free?’

Lulu rose from her chair, and looked at Lady Hartley with fierce hatred blazing in her eyes.

‘Your son’s freedom is not for sale,’ she cried hotly. ‘Speak to him as you have spoken to me. You will

see whether he is willing to face poverty with me or not. If this proposal is the sole object of your visit, perhaps you will permit me to end the interview.'

'Stop one moment,' Lady Hartley said as the girl was sweeping past her. 'Do not leave me like this. I want to speak to you about the girl who believes herself to be Eric's affianced wife. Let me——'

'I will not hear another word,' cried Lulu. 'Be quiet! How dare you come to my house and insult me with your cruel talk? You are a bad woman! You are heartless!'

Lady Hartley was speechless. Fumbling nervously in her dainty satin bag for her handkerchief, she pulled out Muriel Dane's photograph. It fell face upwards on the carpet.

As she bent to pick it up, Lulu, who had seen it fall, stooped also, and snatched the portrait from the floor. Her face changed as she looked at it.

'Who—who is this?' she asked.

'It is Miss Dane, the lady who is engaged to Eric.'

Lulu took the photograph to the window, and with her back turned to Lady Hartley she scrutinized the pictured face. Certainly it was not a pretty one. But the broad forehead, guiltless of fringe, was good to look at; the eyes were singularly clear, limpid, and innocent, the lips sweet and trustworthy. No, it was not a pretty face! And yet—how good, how pure it was!

Suddenly turning, Lulu asked breathlessly:

'Does she love Eric?'

'Very much. It will be a cruel blow to her when she learns that he has jilted her.'

‘You are quite sure that she *does* love Eric?’

‘Quite. They have known each other from childhood. His conduct will break her heart.’

‘I wish that you would leave me,’ Lulu said almost harshly. ‘Let me have the photograph. I will not hurt it, and to-morrow you shall know whether I—whether I—consent to give Eric up or not.’

Lady Hartley, only too glad to feel that the girl’s decision was not yet formed, left the room without another word.

PART II.

It was the face of Sister Désirée! True, Sister Désirée would be white-haired and full of wrinkles by now, were she living, but the photograph of Muriel Dane brought back the features and the very voice of the dead Sister to Lulu.

Placing the photograph upon the table, and propping it up with a book, Lulu sat down facing it, and allowed her thoughts to wander back into her past life.

The bells were ringing from the gray tower of the little Norman church, and she, dressed from head to foot in pure white, was walking down the village street in company with many other small girls. They carried baskets of rose-leaves in their hands, and they strewed the scented petals before the feet of the priest as he marched gravely along beneath his gilt-fringed canopy, reading aloud in a monotonous drawl from the open book in his hand.

Sister Désirée, in her black garments, walked by the side of the children. Every now and then she smiled at Lulu, who was her favourite scholar. Lulu saw in imagination the white linen sheets that hung upon the house walls, and the posies of roses that decorated them. She felt the crisp rushes beneath her little feet, she inhaled the perfume of the fading flowers. And again she heard that injudicious voice say :

‘How beautiful that dark-eyed child is !’

She was the dark-eyed child, and the fête was the fête of God.

Once more the bells rang from the gray tower, once more she was clothed all in white, and again she walked in a processional through the streets. She had taken her first Communion, and there were tears of happy pride in Sister Désirée’s eyes as they rested lovingly upon her pupil.

But the little pupil’s thoughts were not with the Sister, nor did she think of the solemn ceremony that she had just witnessed. There was a note between the leaves of her prayer-book. It was her first love-letter, and she felt that she was walking upon air, while the sun had never seemed so bright nor the sky so blue, nor life such a sweet and wonderful dream.

And then ? Ah, she hardly dared to look back.

There was her running away from home, and her life in Paris, at first so beautiful, so wonderful, so full of enjoyment and happiness. Afterwards came her abandonment, and her meeting with her old friend, Sister Désirée, beneath the flaring lights of a boulevard café.

‘Mary, Mother of God, have pity upon this poor lost child!’

Strange that she had not forgotten the Sister’s prayer! She remembered how tearfully she had clung to the Sister’s hand, and with what gentle, soothing words the nun had comforted her.

Then followed her life at the convent, where Sister Désirée had placed her as seamstress. She sickened afresh as she thought of those cheerless days, those weary nights when she lay awake, regretting the dull, secure present, and longing for the restless, excitable, dangerous past.

How kind the nun had been to her! With what wonderful patience, with what deep love, had she endeavoured to make life brighter for her little friend.

But misery had reached her again, and she had suffered. She would not think of the years that had followed. No, no, no! How could she think of them and look at those pure eyes and those chaste lips? She had met Eric at Monte Carlo, and life assumed a rosier tint; new hope sprang up in her heart when he spoke of marriage. She wanted so much to be like other women—those happy creatures whom she passed in the street, hanging upon the arm of a husband, with children at their side.

Lady Hartley’s words returned to her memory: ‘You have not the power to make my son respect you.’ Was it true? Were those people right who said that there could be no lasting love that was not founded upon respect?

‘Oh, I cannot give him up! I cannot! I cannot!’

she cried ; and those deep, sweet eyes met hers, and told her that Lady Hartley was right, and that if she became Eric's wife the day would come when his love would die, and he would regret his folly.

‘And we shall suffer always,’ said the eyes. ‘Because we are changeless, and can love but once. Must we be sacrificed?’

She laid the portrait where she could not see it. She could not bear to look at it. Why had this English girl a face like the dead Sister's—the Sister who had died praying for her?

It was cruel of Eric's mother to come and torment her. It was wicked of her to bring this photograph.

For how could she be happy with Eric when she thought of his English sweetheart with whom he had broken faith? This girl loved Eric. Who could help loving him? Was he not young and handsome, and generous?

‘I will not give him up!’ Lulu said to herself. ‘Anything but that! Why should I be sacrificed? I have been so unhappy all my life!’

And yet, if in the time to come she lost Eric's love, would she not be more wretched still?

‘He has promised to love me always,’ she cried aloud, and wrung her hands as she thought of the futility of a man's promise.

If only she had some friends to help her!

Suddenly the light came back into her eyes. She placed the portrait between the leaves of a book.

‘I cannot answer for myself,’ she thought. ‘I am too weak, or too selfish. Fate shall decide for me. When

Eric plays at the Casino to-night, I will ask him to stake something at roulette. If red wins, I keep him. If black wins, I—I give him up.'

The Casino at Monte Carlo was crowded that night, Judic was singing at the theatre, and the magnificent hall was full of smartly-attired people. In the gambling saloons the crowds were great around the tables. Eric had to push his way through the groups in order to place his stake upon the black diamond at the end of the green cloth.

Lulu smiled when he looked at her, but her heart ached. She heard the croupier call out that no more money could be staked, and she watched the little ball as it ran round the circle. Something was surely the matter with her eyes, for she could not distinguish the colour of the number that the ball had touched.

As in a dream she heard Eric say that he had won, and she knew that she had lost.

The next morning Lady Hartley, with mingled feelings of horror and unavowed relief, read in the morning papers that Jeanne Alibert, otherwise known as Lulu, had committed suicide at her lodgings. She had poisoned herself.

Lady Hartley laid the paper upon the table. Her face was very white, and she looked shocked.

'The miserable girl!' she said. 'But, after all, it is all for the best, and—and I will pay for her funeral.'

And so it was best—for Lulu.

THE MAN WHO NEVER LOST.

WHAT blind fools these people are who look always upon the surface, and who never attempt to see beneath !

They flatter and cajole me because I never lose my money, no matter how high may be the stake, and they call me lucky, and ask me to kindly explain my system to them. My system ! Fools ! fools ! Who can invent a system that is capable of thwarting the devil ?

For I believe that it is the devil who sits at the croupier's side, and who sends the little ball running, always stopping it upon the numbers that I have chosen. He is not visible to other eyes than mine, but I see him smiling across the green cloth into my face as though to tell me that it is all right, and that he is on my side.

Who can lose in this world with the devil for one's friend ?

And so I win, win, win, and the people crowd around me, nudging each other's elbows, and watching me with greed-filled eyes that burn with the lust of gold.

The devil watches them and laughs. How many

lives have I helped him to win? He alone knows. I can see at a glance the souls that he has already marked in the motley crowd that press and hustle each other's heels in a passionate desire to obtain money. Money! What crimes, what tragedies, have been committed for its sake! It makes one laugh when one sees how men and women sell honour, happiness, and life itself, for a few round coins, that at the utmost can only give them material things for a short time.

The Golden Calf! Always the worship of the tinsel and glitter, with the weak ones crushed and trampled beneath the feet of the strong as they rush onward, trying to get nearer and nearer to the object of their worship.

They honour me, these poor fools; they envy and hate and admire me; and I know that they think me cunning and crafty when I tell them, in reply to their eager questions, that my winning is simply a freak of Dame Fortune.

If I said to them, 'I win because the devil wills it; I win because I have lost all, and have nothing more to lose,' they would smile at me and call me eccentric; but when I could not hear them they would say, 'He is mad!'

S-h-ush! Who spoke of madness? Not I, surely! M-a-d! Ay, it is a merry little word, but you must whisper it. Do not say it aloud, lest they hear you, and find out my secret. For here, shut up in my bedroom, with only the four walls to look at me, and the restless sea outside to carry my cry away upon its

waves, I tell you, you man with the long face and the sunken eyes staring at me from the looking-glass upon my table, that I am mad! Do you hear?—mad! Ha! ha! ha! It makes you laugh, does it? It is a capital joke, a splendid farce, to take in all these greedy, gold-loving people, and to make them envy a madman. That is why I win. Mad people can never lose; they have lost everything. Do you remember before I was mad—when *she* was alive—how a woman once said that when I looked at her I chilled her blood? She died in a madhouse. It is always the insane folk who discover our secret.

Have you forgotten how *her* baby would cry when I touched it? Babies are marvellous little creatures. They know also. No wicked person can deceive a baby. If I opened my arms it would turn its head away, and bury it upon *her* shoulder. It made me angry. It seemed so queer then that my own child should dislike its father. I used to wonder—but that was the devil who whispered it in my ears. I would not listen to him. No; I understand now why the little pure soul shrank from my touch. I did not guess then that it was because I was a madman.

Let me think. When was it that I first discovered my real condition? I had married *her*, and our baby was born, and I was working at my inventions. I wanted to invent a flying machine. I wanted to make a clock that would go for ever and ever, that would never stop, and never require to be wound up.

She used to stand behind my shoulder in the workshop, and watch me. Often I did not know that she

was there. Little white mouse, with her dark fringed eyes and quiet footfall !

‘Is it all right, dearie?’ she would ask, looking at my diagrams, my tools, and my rough models, with wistful eyes and knitted brows.

I always said that it was. But I lied. And when she had left me I laid my head upon the table and cried like a baby. ‘The children of my imagination were beautiful and flawless. When I had created them they were deformed and full of faults.

What was my trade? Was I a clockmaker? I remember people bringing me clocks and watches to be mended, brooches that wanted pins, and rings that had lost stones. At first I mended, and soldered, and worked for them ; but after awhile I grew sick of the dry labour. My brain teemed with inventive ideas. I left the clocks just as they were brought me. They grew gray with dust, and the broken jewellery lay in the drawer of the counter untouched by me.

She saw the people when they came. I never knew or troubled about the excuses that were made for me, and I was glad when they ceased to bring me work to do. I could shut myself up in my workshop, and devote all my time and all my energies to my beloved task. I believed that I had discovered the secret of perpetual motion.

I would not let *her* come into the workshop. I locked the door against her. I wanted to be alone—quite alone. Oh, I was very crafty in those days. I knew what women were—how they chatted and gossiped about their husbands when they got together. Not that

she could have talked much, for I was careful to see that she had few acquaintances. 'A married woman did not want them,' I said, and she assented, occupying herself with the house and garden.

She became very quiet. When we were first married she was always smiling, and she sang as she ran about the house. It is strange how women change!

Then her baby was born. I sat and worked in my shop all that day. I would not go in to see her. I was too busy. There are certain days when one's brain is quick and alert, and it is then that one must seize its ideas before they escape. So I shut myself up, and tried to forget all about her.

The nurse came and asked me to go upstairs. I called to her through the door to go away. I could not be disturbed. She said that I was heartless. Women never understand.

Why did I dislike my own child? It was little, and its head was so large. It seemed to me to be like neither of us. And it was so quiet and white. It only cried when I came near it or touched it.

She—its mother—was like a pale snowdrop after its birth. Her hands were never empty. All day long she was stitching. Work is good for women. Do you hear? I say that it is good. It keeps them occupied. It is the idle women who get into mischief.

She was wrong to love her baby more than she loved me. The husband should always have the first place in the wife's heart. I grew jealous. I hated to see her kiss it. I could not look at it

without feeling angry. It must have been then that my Evil Spirit began to whisper to me. A baby's life is so quickly taken. An open window with the cold air creeping in, the corner of a pillow pressed over its mouth—what was it to do? And who would ever know? No one, the spirit told me, and I knew that it was right.

The spirit only whispered to me when I was not working. He came to me upon those days when an invention had failed, and I sat moody and despondent, watching her as she rocked the cradle with her feet, and drew her needle through the work in her hand.

'Why do you wear such shabby shoes?' I asked her on one of those occasions.

Her slippers were brown and thin. They had large, roughly-sewn patches of cloth upon the sides.

She coloured. She was so pretty when a rosy flush crept into her face.

'They do very well for the house, dear,' she said; 'and now that we have baby——'

Baby! I don't remember what I said to her. I know that she paled, and caught the child from its cradle, pressing it against her bosom, as though she had seen the devil at my elbow, and had caught his jeering suggestion.

Was she not always thinking of the child? Had she not cut up a dress, my favourite, the one I liked to see her in best of all, to make frocks and things for it?

I said that she should have some new shoes, and I made her turn out her little hoard of money. She kept it in an old oaken tea-caddy, with a faded lining

of red velvet in its lid. There were a great many pennies, and a very few shillings. I took them all, and went into the town to buy her a pair of shoes.

The tears came into her eyes, and she murmured something about to-morrow's dinner. Women are always so anxious about the morrow.

They—the shoes—are in that trunk yonder. The soles are almost as fresh as they were the day that I bought them.

Now that I knew where she kept her money, I did not hesitate to go to the old tea-caddy whenever I wanted a new tool or material for my work. I was justified in so doing. When I had first married her, I gave her every week all that was in the till to keep house with. It was only right that we should share what we had. And it was for her that I was working. When my invention was perfect some great man would take it up. I should grow rich, and then she should have all that she desired.

Her baby grew whiter and whiter. It is a curious thing how mothers will cling to those frail little mites, and how perverse they are in loving them all the more for their very helplessness and weakness.

One day I went into the house and found her crying by its cradle. I pulled her up from her knees. I shook her. Goodness only knows what black wickedness was in my heart. She laid her face upon my shoulder, and put her arms around my neck. I could feel her body shaking with repressed sobs.

'What is it?' I demanded ; and my voice sounded harsh and odd in my own ears.

'Baby is dead,' she faltered; and I turned my face away for fear that she should see by its expression how glad I was that I had her once more all to myself.

You remember, you man before me, how we laughed when we were alone, and how happy and light my heart felt.

You have not forgotten how I kissed her and comforted her, nor yet how she clung to me, trying to smile through her tears. She loved me, I tell you, and I—ah, how I loved her!

Let me turn the glass round—so; I cannot bear to look at you. They lied, those people who said that my child died of starvation. Its mother never told you that, and who believes what idle gossips say? How could my child die of hunger when my pockets are full of gold, and I have more money than I can spend? And what if its body *was* laid in a pauper's coffin and *was* buried in a pauper's grave? It did not hurt it.

PART II.

THAT was a very hard winter that followed the child's death—at least, they told me so afterwards. I was too engrossed in my work to take much notice of the weather outside the house.

There was always a fire in the workshop, and when I went into the kitchen for my dinner I never failed to find food ready for me—a little soup, a little bread, and sometimes meat.

I did not mind if the quality was coarse. We men who struggle in our youth for existence have to rough

it. Anything is good enough for us, so that our stomachs are filled. We do not criticise what is given us to eat.

No doubt I could have fared better had I cared to mend clocks and clean watches. But I left that to little Dubois, who was no genius, and who polished up a clock-wheel without giving one thought to its beauty. He would do anything. All my former customers went to him, and soon there was not a dusty clock left upon the shelf nor a bit of jewellery in the drawer.

The bell upon the shop-door had long ceased to tinkle. We had no friends. I had forbidden *her* to make any, and I would not permit her to receive the timid advances that the neighbours made.

I noticed that she grew paler and thinner every day, and that she had no appetite. But she never complained. She could not have been ill. Who ever knew a woman to be suffering, and to say nothing about it? Besides, she was naturally pale, and her grief at losing the baby had pulled her down. That was only to be expected.

It was she who kept the house. I thought nothing about it then; but I know now. She embroidered, and knitted, and made clothes for people who could not afford to employ a good dressmaker. From early morning to late at night her thin fingers were working.

I wanted so many things for my workshop. There was never time for the money to accumulate in the tea-caddy.

Every night I took her into the workroom and

showed her my model of a clock that was to go on ticking for ever and ever, and that would never need a hand to touch it.

Her eyes would dilate and her hollow chest heave. She had faith in me. Oh, my poor girl! my poor girl!

Our rooms grew curiously bare. What did she do with the furniture? Did it supply us with firing, or did she sell it bit by bit to give us bread?

I cannot tell. I would not ask her. I pretended not to notice the empty spaces in the apartments, and I would not see how meagre our meals gradually became, and how small the fires dwindled. She began to cough. How irritating a cough is! It used to disturb me at my work. I could hear her through the walls of my workshop, and at night she could not sleep for pain at her chest and in her back.

Still, coughs are nothing. Everyone gets them in the winter, and that winter must have been exceptionally severe.

She would not have a doctor. He would have ordered her plenty of nourishing things, warm clothing—maybe a change of air. All these things are so easy to prescribe. At that time I could not have given her one of them. Now! Ah, cursed gold that came too late!

I worked all day long. Could any man have done more? I had hours of bitter disappointment, and fleeting moments of intense happiness when I believed that I held in my hands the secret that had baffled man through the long past, and that will still continue to elude his grasp throughout the future.

Let me tell the truth here in these blotted pages. *She* was the sweetest wife, the truest helpmate, that God ever gave to man. She never complained—and I—I—who loved her above everything—I killed her.

Not wilfully. I did not know. I could not tell!

Was it I, after all, or was it that little white baby who had an angel for its mother, and a madman for its father?

Let me think! Let me think!

It was a cold day. It snowed, and the house-tops were white. I remember noticing them, and the gray sky that frowned above them from my window. My fingers were so frozen that I could not use them. That was the first day that the fireplace in my work-room was empty.

I walked up and down the room blowing upon my hands to warm them. I had never felt so chilled in all my life as I felt that morning. Even my brain seemed benumbed, and refused to work.

The house struck me as being curiously quiet. Not a sound came from the kitchen where I had left her working. There was nothing unusual in this stillness. Have you ever noticed how silent a room seems where there is no fire?

What made me open the door and call her name? Some presentiment that evil had befallen her? I cannot say. There came no answer to my cry, and I went into the kitchen.

Did my heart beat more quickly when I found her lying motionless upon the floor at the foot of the chair from which she had fallen?

I picked her up. I rubbed her hands. My fingers were cold, but hers had that dreadful icy heaviness of the lifeless. I could not get them warm. Her face was quite gray, and her lips had turned a pale-blue colour, with a line of white running round them.

And how thin she had grown. Her little body was as light in my arms as a doll must feel in the clasp of a child.

I laid her upon the bed, and covered her with all the clothing that I could find. There was not much in the room. I took off my coat and waistcoat and laid them over her chest. I called to her. I begged her to open her eyes and her lips, and all the while she remained as silent as the dead.

There was no fire in the kitchen grate, no food in the cupboard. Yet she had smiled at me in the morning, and I know that I had eaten and drunk. Yes, I had eaten and drunk while she was perishing for want of food!

I gathered her to me, and, shivering with terror lest life had indeed left her body, I laid down with her while the snow fell softly outside, and some sparrows chirped in a bush beneath the window.

There was a damp stain upon the ceiling. Whenever I looked at it, I saw that it was the cunning, leering face of an imp gloating over my misery. Funny, was it not, that for three years I had seen that mark day after day, and had always mistaken it for a damp stain? It made me laugh. It is so queer, this blindness of ours.

My body grew more cold from contact with hers.

I felt the blood in my veins turning to ice. My head became heavy.

I kissed her again and again. She never once moved. It must have been the snow outside that made us both so cold.

I could not bear it at last. I sprang up and laid her gently back upon the pillow. The little white baby's cradle stood in a corner of the room. I took it into my workshop and tore it into pieces. I collected all the paper that I could find about the house, and I made a pile right in the middle of the workshop floor.

Then I fetched her body and laid it upon the top. I told her that everything I loved should go with her—my tools, my models, even my beloved clock.

I struck a match. Ay, but it made a cheerful little flame. It was pretty to see how the tiny tongue grew larger and larger, and spread over the cradle with a merry crackle. The imps from the kitchen ceiling came in to see it, and the little white baby stood and looked on.

When the flames touched her dress I went out of the room, and left her alone with death.

You remember how we went into the garden and looked up at the windows, and how we laughed to see the dancing, curling red tongues of fire shooting higher and higher. It was a glorious sight.

She came once to the window and beckoned me. We saw her tearing at the fastening, and just as she disappeared the neighbours came rushing into the garden crying that the house was on fire.

How cunning we were ! Even then we were capable of thinking that we must not betray our secret.

No one must know that it was we who had caused that fire.

The people ran up the stairs. I remembered being carried up with them ; but it did not seem as though I walked upon my own feet, nor yet by own volition.

They say that when the door was opened, and *I saw her lying beneath the window*, I dashed into the flames and carried her charred body out of the room, and that I fainted.

She was not dead when I laid her upon her funeral pyre !

* * * * *

That man was mad who, hearing how I had lost my wife and my clever inventions by a cruel fire that had risen no one knew how, sent me a large sum of money to start afresh in business.

Ha, ha ! I drifted here to this home of the wrecked and the wretched, I took a seat at one of the gambling-tables, and the devil has arranged the rest.

Day after day, night after night, I win. I am lord of the Casino, the envied, flattered, and hated of all, and when I die I shall ever live green in the memories of these people as—‘ The Man who never Lost.’

KISMET.

PART I.

‘I WONDER,’ said Miss Rahr, as she daintily joined her pink-tipped fingers together, and cast an admiring glance down at the gleaming jet buckles upon her little shoes, ‘why so many women at this place have white waists and black tails !’

‘*My dear !*’ exclaimed the little, fragile woman at her side, who lay half buried among cushions piled recklessly in a lounge-chair.

‘I guess,’ observed Miss Rahr, after a moment of reflective silence, ‘that none of them have the courage to change it about. I’ve been looking out at meal-times for a woman with a black waist and a white tail. Up to now I haven’t seen one !’

Her friend gave a gasp that was almost plaintive, and wriggled herself into a sitting position. She fixed her green eyes in amazed interrogation upon Miss Rahr’s strong, beautiful face.

‘So I’m going to set them a good example,’ continued Madge Rahr, in a virtuous tone. ‘I’ve got a pretty black waist, and I’ve ordered a white tail to go with it. I shall wear them at dinner to-night.’

Countess Nadjeskey's expression of bewilderment deepened. When she was puzzled she generally smoked. It cleared away the mist from her brain and gave it full play, she said.

So now she drew out a pretty cigarette-case, and gently extracted a neatly-rolled cigarette from it. Madge, raising her eyes from their contemplation of the shoes, watched her friend as she lit the cigarette and placed it between her white teeth.

'I never see you handling cigarettes,' said she, 'without thinking what a pity it is that you have no children. You always touch those little rolls of tobacco so softly and tenderly.'

The Countess gasped again. Miss Rahr was continually giving her electric shocks.

'Will not you take one?' she asked, pronouncing each of the harsh English words with careful distinctness.

'I guess I won't,' said Madge, shaking her brown head. 'I tried once. I'd a headache, and the Count reckoned that a cigarette would steady my nerves. I burnt my nostrils, and made my lips sore, and nearly died through swallowing the horrid smoke, that would go down my throat instead of coming out at my mouth. And the ash fell off and burnt a big hole in my tail—what is it?' she demanded as the Countess ceased to smoke, and raised pathetically inquiring eyes wide with wonder. 'Oh, I dare say it seems funny to you. We American women chew candy, and you Russians smoke. We're all much of a muchness, aren't we?'

'Candy is so sweet,' the Countess remarked with a

shudder. 'It does not soothe like tobacco, and it is sticky. I know you will not think me rude when I say that you Americans would be absolutely delightful if you gave up candy and substituted tobacco. You would be more—more restful. I never look at you without thinking of champagne.'

'And you always remind me of a dear little drowsy kitten, all softness and purr,' said Madge; 'you look like one, too, in that furry gown. I wonder you don't get suffocated, wearing such warm things in this hot climate. There's your husband,' she added, with a perceptible change in her tones that struck curiously upon the Countess's nerves. 'He's going into the Casino, and he's muffled up to the eyebrows in sables. What on earth do you wear in your own country?'

'Furs,' answered the Countess. 'Lots and lots of fur.'

She rose from her chair, and, leaning over the balcony, watched her husband's figure pass up the wide, carpeted steps that led to the doors of the Casino.

The bright sunshine seemed to turn his fair hair into gold. It played upon his short, pointed beard as he paused at the top of the steps to speak to another gentleman. How young, how noble, how full of life and vigour he looked! The searching rays of the sun brought out no imperfections in his light complexion, which appeared to be as fair and clear as a healthy child's. His blue eyes were keen, and sparkled with animation.

The Countess watched him between her half shut

lids, puffing pale clouds of smoke from her pursed-up lips. In the sunlight that fell with full force upon her, one saw many silver threads running among the blonde meshes of hair that she wore in a loose and picturesque twist low upon her somewhat long neck.

Her eyes gleamed like narrow slits of green glass. In the easy, comfortably-fitting velvet gown that she wore, her spare figure gained a fictitious air of substantiality. But even the thick folds of the material failed to disguise completely her extraordinary thinness.

Her small, pink palms rested like rose-petals upon the iron balustrade. They might have been a baby's hands, so tiny and soft and helpless they seemed.

The Count parted with his friend, turned to glance after a young girl, who ran lightly down the steps, carrying a huge bunch of violets, and then passed into the Casino. The Countess watched and smoked, until a faint sigh, that was half strangled in its birth, caused her to turn her head with a quickness of movement quite foreign to her habitual indolence of action.

Madge was looking at the Casino doors with a pained expression in her face. When her friend glanced at her, she shifted her regard to the gilded head that adorned the front of the building, and her sigh became a smile.

'I wonder,' she said, 'if that is old François Blanc? That queer glory thing round his unfortunate head always reminds me of a lot of spikes. He looks just

as though he knows he has been beheaded and stuck up there as a warning to other financiers.'

She regarded the head contemplatively for a few moments.

'After all,' said she, with a wistful attempt at mirthfulness, 'the spikes are rather suggestive, aren't they, Olga? The sculptor must have intended to preach a moral. Much glory, many spikes. Phew! how hot the sun is!'

The Countess threw away her partly finished cigarette, and lit another with a great deal of care. A waiter, anxiously hovering near, rushed forward to draw down the red and white striped sun-blinds.

'Don't!' commanded Madge sharply.

The waiter was used to imperativeness, but he jumped nervously. The Countess's eyes grew more and more narrow.

'I like the sun,' Madge said, by way of explanation. 'What is the use of coming here if one shuts it out? One had better stay in one's own country.'

'When the blinds are down,' the Countess remarked gravely, 'one cannot see the people passing in and out of the Casino.'

The sun glowed in Madge's cheeks, mounting to her forehead and losing itself among her glossy hair.

'I have often felt surprised,' the Countess said between dainty puffs, 'that you have never married. You are unusually beautiful even for an American. Unfortunately, your face is a fraud!'

'Olga!'

There was such shame, such piteous, miserable

deprecation in the girl's voice, that the Countess's heart gave a quick leap of sympathy.

Her voice was very steady when she spoke again, and the careless expression in her face had deepened.

'Yes, dear, it *is* a fraud. You give strangers an impression of owning great strength of character, when in reality you are sadly weak. Forgive my candour. Have you ever remarked the fact that you and I say things about each other to one another that would have ripped our friendship in half long ago had we been like ordinary women? I have noticed it often. I called your face a harsh name, and yet we are still friends.'

Madge laughed uneasily.

'I don't think I've forgiven you, though,' she said, with a catch in her voice. 'It's rather a take-down to one's pride to find that one's best friend has found one out. You wrapped up your pill in sugar by calling me beautiful; but the sugar has rubbed off somehow, and the pill sticks in my throat, Olga!' She laid her hand upon the Countess's arm, looking into the pale, fascinating face almost timidly. 'I guess it makes me feel sick to think what a puny little soul I own.'

'We did not make our souls.'

'That doesn't hinder us from trying to make them bigger!' cried Madge.

The Countess shrugged her shoulders, and knocked off the ash from the tip of her cigarette.

'We can try, and keep on trying. Nothing hinders us, as you say, only our efforts are thrown away, and

the exertions we have forced ourselves to make leave us less strength with which to meet danger. Invalids frequently become worse in health through over-taxing their strength. Moral and physical weaknesses are greatly alike.'

'You think that we can't help ourselves?' asked Madge, knitting her brows, but with a sudden hopeful light shining in her eyes. 'You mean that we must just let ourselves glide, and submit to circumstances? Is that it?'

The Countess nodded.

'Yes; that is it. Fate is all-powerful. We can do nothing. What is to be will be,' she declared gravely.

'But drowning folks would often die if they made no fight for life,' Madge objected after a moment's reflection.

'If they are rescued, it is because Destiny willed it. Their efforts to avoid drowning have nothing whatever to do with the seeming result,' the Countess declared in tones that carried conviction, and struck coldly upon her listener's heart.

Madge shivered. Rising impetuously from her seat, she pulled a rose to pieces, dropping the petals upon the pavement below.

The large café opposite the hotel was teeming with life. A band of Hungarian performers, looking picturesque in their national costume, were playing a sad, weird melody, that seemed to take the warmth from the sun and the vivid colours from the glaring beds of flowers in the gardens.

As Madge listened to the music, the seats filled

with smartly-dressed people, the streets gay with horses and carriages and pedestrians, the chinking of glass, the hurrying forms of the busy waiters, and the murmur of many voices, died and faded away from her sight and hearing.

The wind seemed to moan and to shriek long agonized wails of misery, dead leaves rustled beneath dying trees and skies heavy with rain. Forgotten voices called to other forgotten voices, and everything spoke of death.

‘Oh!’ Madge exclaimed, with a start.

Someone had crept behind her. The perfume of violets caused her nostrils to dilate with pleasure. It was Count Serge, who had joined his wife and her friend, bringing with him a bouquet of flowers for each lady.

‘What an exquisite melody!’ he said, bending over the balcony by Madge’s side. ‘I don’t know why it stirs me so. You are sure to laugh at me, Miss Rahr, when I confess that its pathos is almost more than I can stand.’

‘How much money have you lost, *mon ami*?’ the Countess asked, with a suspicion of sarcasm in her level tones.

A frown gathered upon the Count’s white brow, but it refused to rest there. He turned a reproachful glance upon his little wife as she lay curled up among her furs smoking incessantly.

‘What a question, Olga!’ he cried. ‘Does it imply that my losses, and not the music, are responsible for my emotion? I hope you are not going to develop a

sarcastic tendency. It is not a graceful accomplishment for a lady.'

Madge was playing restlessly with the violets in her hands. As she leant over the balcony, they seemed to slip from her fingers. The bouquet, falling, struck a man passing beneath. He glanced up in astonishment, smiled, and raised his hat. Count Serge's lips drew themselves together beneath his tawny moustache.

'My unhappy flowers!' he murmured. 'How cruel of you to let a stranger have them!'

'I guess he's not a stranger. I've—I've met him at Nice,' Madge said hurriedly.

She spoke in an almost apologetic tone, the varying colours coming and going in her face. Her eyes were bent upon the ground. She felt, with angry resentment against her weakness, that she looked confused, and had an air of being ashamed because she had thrown away Count Serge's flowers.

The Countess's inscrutable eyes never left Madge's face. Miss Rahr grew more uneasy. She drew out her watch.

'My goodness!' she cried, making a poor attempt at being astonished. 'I'd no idea that it was so awfully late. The dressing-bell must have rung an age ago. We've only got an hour to dress in, and I do want such a lot of time to make myself smart to-night.'

She escaped from the room, giving the Countess a wistful smile as she flitted past the lounge-chair. With her foot upon the lower step of the stair, she paused

and glanced out at the waving palms and the climbing roses growing around their trunks.

‘I *did* mean to throw those violets away,’ she said to herself; ‘but I didn’t think for a moment that they would hit anybody. And George Gordon, too, of all people in the world. Olga would say it was fate—I wonder—oh, I am sick of everything! If dad would only take me across the herring-pond to-morrow, right away to New York, I guess I’d be happier by a long chalk.’

Clenching her little hand, she shook a doubled fist at the gay-looking Casino.

‘I hate you!’ she murmured vindictively. ‘You look no end smiling. You’re a great devouring monster. You’re full up with tragedies, and who would think it to look at you?’

She walked up the stairs, the discontented expression deepening in her eyes.

‘How much *did* he lose?’ she said, below her breath. ‘Dad guessed he’d had pretty big losses for the past fortnight. Olga never says anything. I’ve a great mind to shake her! There’s her husband going to the bad as fast as he can go, and she just sits in a comfortable chair and smokes cigarettes! It’s heartless, that’s what it is, *there!*’

PART II.

THE little door that divided the library from the smoking-room of the large hotel had been left open by some hurried or careless person.

Countess Nadjeskey, coming into the library in

search of a book, caught the sound of men's voices and low chuckling laughs issuing from the smoking-room. Someone was speaking Russian. The Countess coughed slightly in order to make the speakers aware of her presence.

A louder laugh followed, then another low chuckle. The Countess listened, the little pale face growing harder, and her green-tinted eyes gleaming strangely.

'I tell you, my boy, it is the easiest conquest I've ever made,' said the soft, musical voice of her husband. 'The girl is like wax. She's a fine young creature—a perfect type of womanhood. I like those big brown-haired beauties.'

'Oh, she's a handsome girl! But I'm inclined to think you've underrated her moral qualities. She doesn't look one of your babyish, yielding women. Her face is a strong one. Tell you the truth, Serge, I believe you're misled by your confounded vanity. The women make such a lot of you because you've got a mixture of Russian and German titles, and because you're rather a good-looking chap. But Miss Rahr is not what you take her for. Don't you flatter yourself!'

'Do you consider yourself to be a good judge of women's character?' asked Serge lazily.

'Oh, rather! I don't say I've had quite so many opportunities of dissecting 'em as you've had; but, on the whole, I'm a decent judge of the cattle.'

'I'll bet you—any odds you like—that by the tenth of this month Miss Rahr is in Paris with me,' said Serge. 'Do you take me?'

The Countess shivered. By degrees she had crept nearer and nearer to the open door. Her movements were always feline; just now, her crouching, lithe body suggested a panther waiting to spring upon its victim.

‘Hum! There’s a fellow hanging about Miss Rahr. A big Englishman. He’s sweet on her. Leave her alone, Serge. Hang it all, man! we can’t make a bet like that. It doesn’t seem decent.’

Serge laughed heartily.

‘Admit that you see no chance of winning your money, Ivan,’ said he coldly. ‘You’re afraid to take me! You know I shall win!’

An oath fell from the other man’s lips. The Countess heard a sound of chairs being pushed back, a smack as of hands meeting, and Ivan’s voice saying :

‘Done! But I shall be the winner this time. You’ve only got two days to work in. You’ll lose, old man!’

Serge made a reply that was replete with easy confidence.

‘How about your wife?’ asked Ivan in answer to it.

‘Olga? Oh, she’ll be all right. I’ll leave her in your charge, and may her sweet society compensate you for your loss of the bet!’

Drawing away from the door, the Countess’s hand struck against some hard object in her dress-pocket. It was her cigarette-case. Pulling it out, she carefully selected a cigarette, and went from the room. Her quiet footfall made no sound upon the rich softness of the carpet.

As she passed through the wide hall a young, stalwart Englishman, with abject misery written in every line of his honest face, came down the stairs. He was brushing almost rudely by the Countess, when she laid her hand decisively upon his arm. The young man looked up with a start.

‘It’s no use,’ he said wretchedly. ‘I’ve asked her. She doesn’t care a rap for me.’

‘Did she tell you so?’

He nodded, carefully keeping his eyes turned from her calm face.

‘There’s someone else in the way—someone whom she can’t marry, she says. She’s none too happy. What a horrid world this is!’

‘It does not seem to be a particularly cheerful place just at present,’ the Countess said softly. ‘But do not lose heart, George. And do not go away in what you call a huff. Remember that Madge is as dear to me as my own daughter would be had I one. You may trust me to do my best for you. I should like to see you married. I feel so sure that you would be happy together.’

He was only a boy, and his young face flushed rosily with hope. He caught her hand, and pressed it hard.

‘How good you are!’ he exclaimed. ‘I do love Madge so much; you can’t think what it feels like to put all your cards into one castle, and then to see the whole airy building swept away!’

‘I think I understand,’ she said, going away and leaving him.

* * * * *

Count Serge had given his valet a holiday. It was Carnival time, and the man had begged permission to go to Nice.

He had laid out his master's clothes before leaving the house, and, in obedience to the Count's instructions, had cleaned a pair of pistols, that were the pride of his master's heart, and had taken the life of many a soft, white pigeon in their time.

The Count was astonished on entering his dressing-room to find his wife sitting in his most luxurious chair, with the inevitable cigarette between her lips. He felt an uncomfortable twinge at seeing her. His losses at the Casino had been tremendous, and it was his wife's fortune that he had gambled away. It was unlike Olga to make a scene, especially about money matters. But even an exemplary patient woman may lose patience, and, really, he had been reckless in his play. He had not yet dared to reckon up his losses.

'What a charming surprise !' he said politely. 'You do not often favour me with your company, Olga—not often enough.'

Taking no apparent notice of his words, the Countess rose from her seat, walked to the door of the dressing-room, that opened into the corridor, and swiftly turned the key in the lock. The Count watched her with smiling eyes, his eyebrows slightly raised with surprise.

'I am not a melodramatic person. I hate melodrama,' said the Countess brusquely. 'I should not have locked the door had I not received ample proofs of your cowardice. I do not intend that you shall

run away, and your pride will prevent your calling for help. It is in bad taste, perhaps, to remind you of the fact that you were a poor man when I married you. I have remained silent while you squandered my money, and frittered away my estates bit by bit. I never complained about your pleasures. You have had a free rein and no curb, *mon ami*.'

'I shall be glad to know what you mean,' cried the Count furiously. 'Have you locked me in simply for the pleasure of abusing me?'

'I do not abuse you. I state facts. I have forgiven and overlooked much in your conduct. Now I can forgive and overlook no more. I know the horrible bet that you have made with Ivan Micavitch. I love Madge more than anything in the world. Her honour is more to me than you. Would you know why I have locked the door? I will tell you, Serge Nadjeskey : *you have to fight a duel with me !*

'You are mad, Olga ! A duel with my wife—with a woman ! It is absurd !'

She read the terror in his eyes, and saw it graven around his quivering lips. His face had grown a dull gray.

'He looks like the tip of my cigarette before it falls,' she thought. Aloud she said :

'I am not mad. There is no absurdity in your fighting with me. It is more brave than to desert me, as you proposed doing. Come, take up your pistol. You need not tremble, Serge. The advantage lies, as it has always lain, with you. Can you not think that you are shooting at a pigeon?'

She took up one of the pistols that the man-servant had cleaned and charged, and held it out to her husband. He drew back, shuddering, and raised his hands before his eyes.

‘For goodness’ sake, put the thing down. I told Ivanovitch to charge them both. It may go off! Olga, Olga!’

‘Will you take the pistol?’ she demanded pitilessly.

‘Never; you are mad! You are a fool! I fight only with sane people!’

Her hand trembled with anger. There was a loud report, a puff of blue-gray smoke, and a dull thud that shook the room, making the dainty appointments of the dressing-table dance and jingle. The Countess ran swiftly to the door, unlocked it, and returning to the writhing heap twisting itself into convulsive shapes upon the carpet, she knelt down by its side.

‘Oh, Madge,’ she whispered, ‘there was no other way to save you—no other way, my dear.’

The form upon the carpet was still now. When a terrified maid and an inquisitive valet rushed into the room, they found the dead body of the Count, and the seemingly lifeless body of the Countess, lying side by side.

Before half an hour had passed, the rumour was rife in Monte Carlo that Count Serge Nadjeskey had committed suicide because of his terrific losses at the Casino, and that his wife had been the first person to rush to his assistance. So the Casino gained the reputation of gorging yet another life. But later on Madge Rahr and George Gordon were married.

‘EASILY WON, EASILY LOST.’

THE little French millionaire sat under the awning that protected the customers of the Grand Café de Paris from the dazzling rays of the hot March sun.

He was a pathetic-looking man, small of stature, thin-featured, and somewhat lined and careworn in appearance, despite the accredited possession of a vast fortune and the pleasures it was supposed to yield him.

A great many rings glistened upon his long fingers. He wore a fine diamond pin in his red satin cravat, and a massive gold watch-chain hung loosely over his waistcoat. His meagre figure was swallowed up in a handsome fur-trimmed coat, and his little feet were daintily shod with Pinet's most expensive and elaborately pointed patent leather shoes.

The table at his side held a tall glass of coffee and a decanter half filled with brandy. From time to time the little man sipped sadly at his coffee, drinking it without exhibiting the smallest sign of enjoyment or satisfaction.

He seemed to take no interest in the crowd of more or less smartly dressed people that surrounded him.

The music from a band inside the café brought no happy look into his face. It was only when an over-worked, sallow-complexioned, bustling waiter rushed past his chair, laden with glasses and confectionery, that his eyes grew strangely bright, and he held up his head, following the waiter's movements with parted lips and absorbed attention.

A burly Englishman at an adjoining table left a franc upon his plate for the waiter who was helping him into his coat. The millionaire smiled softly when he saw the money, and beckoned the recipient to him.

‘Three francs within the past half-hour, Jean,’ said he. ‘You are fast making your fortune.’

The waiter, weary of foot, gaunt of frame, and leaden-eyed, shrugged his shoulders, and looked at the franc despondingly before dropping it into the leathern bag that hung around his waist.

‘The wife is ill at home,’ he observed, flicking the table with a cloth, ‘and there are four little mouths to fill.’ He glanced at his rusty coat, and carefully removed a speck of thistle-down that the capricious wind had carried and left there.

The millionaire's hand sought his pocket. His hand crept into the waiter's, leaving a coin in the hard palm.

‘Oh, sir!’ cried the man.

He had no time to say more. An imperative tapping, a cry of ‘Garçon! garçon!’ in more than one direction, the loud voice of a page-boy telling him that he was wanted at the end of the café, made him

hobble painfully away. Once he glanced back at the little man, who was staring sadly around him, with an air of ultra-despondency, and his lean fingers stole into a waistcoat-pocket and felt for the gold coin that had snuggled itself comfortably into a dusty corner, with a stray match and a fragment of a cigarette.

John Holden, from his seat near the millionaire, had witnessed the incident. He also had reason to feel grateful to the Frenchman whose name in the visitors' books was Paul Driancourt. John had made his acquaintance at one of the roulette-tables in the Casino. The croupier at John's side had been raking in John's napoleons and five-franc pieces until at last the young man had risen in angry despair, with a bad word upon his lips and no money in his pockets.

'Why go away when the luck will turn?' asked a voice behind him. 'Put something on number seventeen, and you will win.'

John had shaken his head, seeking to push past the Frenchman, who barred his way.

'No? You will not?' asked Driancourt. 'Well, then, watch me.'

And, to John's amazement, number seventeen won.

'How the dickens did you know it was going to win?' he demanded.

The Frenchman shrugged his thin shoulders, and bent over the table to collect his winnings on the green cloth.

'It is very long,' said he, 'since that number came up, and it was bound to do so on an average once in every thirty-two times.'

So John became his friend, and every night saw the two men in the gambling-rooms. Driancourt had the most enviable good luck.

‘You only have to look at a number and the ball rolls into it at once,’ John said sometimes to him. ‘You are the luckiest chap I ever came across.’

Driancourt always sighed when anyone called him lucky. The number and the depth of his sighs, together with the habitual sadness upon his face, told John that his friend did not consider himself to be fortunate, even though he was so rich.

He was simply invaluable to John, who was very much inclined to favour reckless play, and who would have followed fantasy altogether had his Mentor allowed him to do so. John’s French was just as execrable as the Frenchman’s English was good, so John gave up French altogether.

‘I say,’ John said, rising now from his seat, and sauntering across to Driancourt, ‘I’ve often wondered why you’re so confoundedly good to waiters.’

Driancourt stroked his glass of coffee, looked earnestly into the younger man’s honest face, and said :

‘If I were not afraid that it would make a difference in our friendship, I would tell you. But you English are so proud !’

John stretched out his big hand and crushed the little man’s fingers. Driancourt winced, but he understood what that hand-grip was intended to say.

‘We’ll go on the terrace,’ he said. ‘There won’t be many people there now, because of the sun and

the dust. I don't mind telling you my history, but I shouldn't like anyone else to hear it.'

'Oh, I won't tell a soul, old man,' declared John rashly.

John was not married then. I doubt if this story would have ever been written had he remained a bachelor.

They crossed the white road where the wind was sending long clouds of dust over the gardens, and passed into the shaded grounds of the Casino. The terrace was quite empty. Shouts of hearty mirth came every now and then from the children's theatre, where a French Punch and Judy were delighting their audience.

Driancourt took a corner seat that faced the sea, and, with his sombre eyes fixed upon the intense blue of the waters, began his story :

'My father was a peasant. My mother—God rest her soul !—died while I was a tiny baby in a cap and that queer collection of bundled-up clothing that looks so like a stuffed pillow-case. Aunt Heloise brought me up. Ours was a hard-working household. At six years of age I had to help collect fodder for the rabbits, and when I was but eight it was I who took the cow by the river-side to feed. That was how I met—Marie.'

His voice dropped so much that the last word was only a whisper.

'Met *who*?' asked John, knocking out his pipe upon the arm of the seat.

'Marie—Marie Leseul,' replied Driancourt. His

voice was firmer now. ‘She was a year younger than I, and she, too, had to mind her father’s cow and take it where the most tender clumps of grass grew.

‘I used to leave my own cow Bébé to shift for itself until Marie’s animal had been tethered in the very best place that I could find for it. Ah, but it was Marie who was bonny to look at! Many an artist has begged permission to sketch her as she stood near the cow, amongst those tall purple spikes of flowers and the high reeds that grow on river-banks. But if old Jules Leseul was near he would not permit anyone to paint a picture of his little one unless the artist paid him in good French money first.

“‘If she is worth painting, she is worth paying for,” said he in his hard rasping voice.

‘Sometimes the artists paid, and sometimes they did not. Jules saved the money that Marie earned in this way for her *dot*. And so much money did he get, my friend, that when Marie was about sixteen she was the richest girl in our village.

‘Such a beautiful village it was,’ said Driancourt very softly, so that John stared at him in growing amazement. ‘The thatched roofs were thick with house-leek, and brown and yellow with lichen and stonecrop. I shall have seen many villages in my time, but there will have been but one La Vacherie. And of all the pretty girls, Marie was the prettiest. No girl was asked so much to dance as she, when our fête came round, and we all danced together in front of the château; it was Marie who was the queen.

‘You must know,’ he continued, after a pause,

during which two white pigeons flew down from the roof of the Casino, and drew near in quest of biscuit, 'that my father was poor. So poor was he, that coffee we only tasted upon the Sundays, and meat when fête-day came to us. On week-days we ate potatoes and bread and drank cider. Now, you must also know that the father of Marie was not poor. He had two cows, and goats, and land. And, being a hard man, he increased his possessions greatly.

'Marie and I had always been good friends. It was from my fingers that she took the holy water when we went to church on Sunday, and I it was who carried home her basket from market. Ah, those happy days of one's youth!' said Driancourt, with sudden enthusiasm lighting up his careworn face. 'The love that comes to one's heart in after-life is never so sweet as the first, and no sweetheart wears such a halo around her as the love of one's boyhood.

'Well, I loved Marie. But with us it is not the custom to take long walks with one's beloved, nor yet to tell her all the big, holy thoughts that press down one's heart. One must go to the father and make him understand. And the walks and kisses come with us after the marriage.

'It was hard for me to go to Jules, and to tell him that I wished to wed Marie. I had no money, and at the silk factory, where I worked, the pay was little, and kept growing smaller and smaller. And while I was making myself miserable, and turning over in my mind the different ways there were before me of earning money, Marie was becoming more and more beautiful, and Pépin Duval, the miller's son, had

purchased a fine new suit, and waited in the church porch for Marie, even as I did. One day, so angry did I feel at his presumption, that I called him out of the building.

“Thou shalt not offer the holy water to Marie Leseul,” I said. “I would have thee know once and for all that the privilege to do so is mine. No cur such as thou shalt wrest it from me.”

Pépin struck out, and knocked me down flat in the dust at his feet.

“Not only will I give her the holy water,” cried he, “but before three years have passed she shall take my name. Mark my words, thou camel.”

Now, it is a sad insult to call a person a camel in my country. One cannot well be offered a greater indignity. I sprang to my feet, and returned Pépin his blow. So we fought together in the market square, near the blessed statue of Our Lady, and while we were tussling and pulling each other about, I heard a woman scream, and the next moment Marie herself had rushed between us, pushing us apart, so that we fell back like soldiers at the command of their officer.

“Shame! shame!” cried she.

My heart sank, for it was not to Pépin that she spoke, but to me, and her eyes sparkled with anger.

“There is no shame,” I muttered, “in fighting a thief.”

“Why,” said Pépin, “I did but seek to be first in the church porch. I am no thief.”

Just then up came Jules, dressed in his Sunday black, and looking very severe and angry.

"Go to church," said he to Marie. "Thy place is not here among these brawlers. Leave me with them."

"I would know," I said, before she could obey, "if Pépin is a liar as well as a thief. Hast thou promised to marry him in three years' time? Answer me, Marie!"

"She shall not answer thee," retorted Jules. "Maidens such as she have nought to say to a ne'er-do-well as thou art. Go, Marie!"

'But, to my joy, Marie came swiftly to my side, regardless of the little crowd that had collected near us.

"I *will* answer," she cried. "My word is not given to Pépin. If thou wert rich, my father would not call thee a ne'er-do-well. Pépin is going to England to make a fortune. My father has promised that I shall become his wife if in three years' time he has saved enough money to enable us to take a café. Paul," said she, laying her little hand upon my arm, and speaking so clearly that all heard her words, "go to England also, and if thou returnest in four—nay, even in five—years' time with the sum of money that my father demands, I will marry thee."

"If Pépin returns before Paul, thou shalt marry Pépin and no other," declared Jules. "Thy word is not engaged, but mine is."

"I will wait for Paul," said Marie.

"Thou shalt not wait longer for him than thou wouldst wait for Pépin," cried her father. "This I say, that I will give thee in marriage to the first of

these lads who comes home with enough money to start a café—money that has been gained by honest means.”

‘Pépin and I shook hands, though for my part I would more willingly have struck him, so filled with jealous envy was my heart. He had a cousin in London, who was a waiter in a restaurant, and who was making much money. This cousin had written to Pépin offering to procure him a situation in the same house. So it was all made easy for Pépin,’ said Driancourt sadly. ‘But for me it was very, very hard.

‘I travelled to London in Pépin’s company.

‘Pépin’s cousin was a brave lad. He got me into a boarding-house near the Museum. I suffered much in that dwelling. The language was hard to learn, and the black-beetles in the dark hole where I slept were very numerous. And the mistress was a cruel woman, and heartless, so that my life became miserable.

‘One day I met a Frenchman who had just come to London. He was a good man, and gave me much kindness, so that I told him of Marie. His heart filled with pity for my hard lot in the boarding-house, where the work was never ended, and the mistress always in a fury. When he left London he gave me a louis, and promised to remember me, and to write to me if he happened to hear of a better situation.

‘He kept his word. And one afternoon, when I was in worse disgrace than ever, through offering the ladies a raw cauliflower at table, that I thought the English liked as salad, there came a letter from my friend, telling me that his uncle at Monte Carlo wanted

a waiter who could speak English. I came here, but you will not see the café any more. It was burnt down.'

One of the white pigeons fluttered nearer as John scattered the ash from his pipe.

'You've had a hard time, old man,' he said feelingly, and quite by accident his hand fell with a tremendous slap upon Driancourt's knee.

'I have what you call a hard time now,' Driancourt answered. 'Those days were my happy ones. How carefully I treasured up each franc, each sou! Every one that I saved was to bring me nearer to Marie. I got many *pourboires*—tips, as you say in your tongue—and when I went to bed at night I used to count them and kiss them even, and tell them that they were going to buy me the greatest happiness of my life. *Hélas!* It was misery that they gave me. Nothing else!'

He turned his head, and looked long at the building behind him. A cluster of pigeons made a big white spot over one of the heavily ornamented windows.

'If I had only been content to wait!' murmured Driancourt mournfully, and the wind hissing sharply round a corner echoed and carried away the sigh that accompanied his words of regret. 'Oh, my friend, believe me, success only comes truly to those who work and wait with open hands. Rush to meet the goddess, and she gives you dust and sour wine, and the bread of bitterness.'

He paused, shook his head, and returned to his contemplation of the blue sea.

‘Well, I saved money. I wrote to Marie, and told her to rejoice, for I should certainly return home before Pépin, and she should be married in a beautiful white muslin gown, and we would feast at the village hotel, and she should be mistress of a little café.

‘One evening a woman rushed into the café where I was waiter. She was red in the face, and so filled with excitement that at first I believed her to be drunk. She laughed aloud as she passed me.

“A telegraph-form. Quick, quick!” she cried.

“I brought her one. She tore off her gloves, and took up a pen. Her fingers shook so much that the pen fell.

“Write for me,” said she, pushing it eagerly into my hands. “Write, ‘Luck has turned. Have won seven thousand francs.’” Then she laughed like a mad creature and clapped her hands.

‘I wrote as she bade me. She was so joyous that she opened her bag and gave me a louis. Now, she was not beautifully dressed. Her gown was stained and ragged at the hem, and her bonnet was ugly, and not new. I could understand nothing. When she gave me the louis, I saw that the bag was full of money—gold and silver and notes.

“Look!” she said suddenly. “See what I have won in one day!”

‘She opened the bag wide. I have wished since that I had been stricken with blindness before my eyes rested upon her winnings.

“I shall win more to-morrow,” she cried. “The

plucking of the crow has at last begun. He has taken much from me in the past. Now my turn has come to strip his carcase !”

‘I could not sleep all that night. And as I tossed about on my bed, I thought of the woman’s bag of money, and how good it would be if I could only win one thousand francs. Marie should wear a white silk gown at our wedding, and we would feast and make merry for three days instead of one. The more I thought of it the greater grew my desire to make an attempt at winning a fortune, even as the woman had.

‘The next afternoon I obtained permission from my master to absent myself for one hour. I went into the Casino with all my savings in my pockets. In half an hour I was without a sou !

‘I returned to my work, savage, maddened with despair. For a whole year I had been saving, and in thirty little minutes the Casino had swallowed up my economies. Never shall I forget my utter despondency and the bitter self-reproach that made my ill-luck the harder to bear. Marie seemed lost to me. I felt that Pépin would win her. I could have dashed out my brains in an agony of remorse for my folly.

‘I had queer dreams. I dreamt that I staked a five-franc piece upon number five, and that it won three times in succession. This vision haunted me. As soon as my eyes were closed in sleep, the dream came to give me happiness. You know,’ said Driancourt, ‘that no servants, nor yet an inhabitant of any part of the Alpes Maritimes, must enter the gambling-saloons. But sometimes, as you have noticed, the attendants do not ask for your card of admission.

No one troubled me. I went again to the Casino, and number five won !”

‘By Jove !’ exclaimed John.

‘If I had stopped then !’ said Driancourt regretfully. ‘But the fever of gambling had got deep into my blood, and there is no earthly help for a man’s soul when once the greed of gain has taken hold of his heart. Again and again I won. Again and again I visited the Casino. I threw up my work. I no longer watched my opportunity for slinking past the doorkeeper. I applied for a card. I was one of the first to enter the Casino when it opened, and one of the last to leave it. And as I counted up my winnings, I said, “To-morrow I will play no more ; I will go to Marie.” But when the morning came, my feet carried me into the Casino ; or I said to myself, “When I have won enough to *buy* the little café, I will never return to the Casino.”

‘Then I thought how nice it would be to own a hotel. Pépin might keep a café ; Marie and I would have a hotel, and a maid and one or two waiters to work for us. But as I grew richer, I laughed at the idea of a hotel. Why should we toil at all ? I would make enough money to purchase a house, and we would live happily beneath our own roof, Marie and I.

‘But before I could give up gambling I must have some cows, a carriage, and lands. Marie should be a *grande dame*. And how we would pity poor Pépin toiling and sweating to get bread for his little ones. I grew rich—ah, so rich ! I bought a villa. It was a beautiful house. The gardens ran down to the sea. They were planted with lovely flowers, and stocked

with orange and lemon groves, and at the back there was an olive plantation and vineyards. I sent to Paris for the richest piece of white satin that money could buy, and I filled a box with real orange-blossoms gathered from my own trees. Then I dressed myself in fine new clothes, and went back to La Vacherie with the satin and bridal flowers for my little one.

'Old Jules was sitting under an apple-tree reading a journal, with Marie knitting at his side. They did not recognise me at first. Jules bowed, and called me "monsieur," and Marie blushed and drooped her black eyes lower upon her work.

"Dost thou not know me?" I cried. "I am Paul. I have returned before Pépin. Marie, art thou still of the same mind?"

'She gave a low cry of "Paul, Paul! my dear one!" and ran into my arms, pressing kisses upon my handsome coat, laughing and crying together.

'But Jules shut his great mouth with a snap, frowned, and pulled her roughly away.

"How happens it that thou returnest before two years have passed?" he asked, looking severely at me. "Thou wentest away dressed as a poor lad. Now thy clothes are the clothes of a rich man."

'I told him how I had made a great fortune, and that I had brought satin and orange-blossoms with me for Marie, and that I owned a house and land.

"My daughter shall never be thy wife!" exclaimed Jules. "Money got so easily as thine is as easily lost. Dost thou think that I would give my only child to a gambler—a man who has got a fortune from the wretched, and who has not gained it by hard work?"

‘Marie cried—a cry of utter despair.

“‘I will gamble no more,” said I. “’Twas but for Marie.”

““Look at thyself,” cried Jules harshly. “Thy face is the face of an old man. Gold has eaten away thy youth. Marie is for a better man than thou.”

‘She clung to his knees, praying brokenly that he would not send me away, murmuring that she could love no other man but me. He thrust her away as he might have thrust a dog that sought to play with his feet.

““Father! father!” she moaned. “Have pity!”’

Driancourt paused. John looked in his face.

‘And——’ he asked.

Driancourt rose stiffly from his seat. ‘The children were trooping out of the theatre. People were gathering upon the terrace.

‘I burnt the satin,’ said he. ‘And the orange-blossoms died with my hope. Pépin saved enough money to take a miserable café in a dingy back-street, and Marie married him. I went to see them once. Marie curtsied to me, and Pépin treated me as though I were a prince. I shall not go again. When I see them so happy, so enviable, my pain is greater than I can bear. The contrast between my wretched lot and Pépin’s happiness is too great.’

The wind brought a sweet, haunting fragrance of orange-blossoms from the groves. A little baby-girl toddled to John, and peeped into his face with the smiling confidence of happy childhood.

‘Poor old chap!’ said John in his blunt English way. ‘I say, let’s go and have a drink.’

THE MYSTERY OF VILLA FRANCIOSY.

PART I.

FATHER GIORGI walked slowly up and down beneath a trellis covered with vines. At present the vines were very ugly to look at. They were brown and knotted and barren, and appeared to be dead. It seemed quite impossible that those dull, apparently lifeless shrubs would produce luxuriant green foliage and clusters of luscious fruit later on.

The old priest held a book between the thumb and finger of one long lean hand. From time to time he raised his eyes from the pages before them, and looked up reverently at the cloudless expanse of brilliantly blue sky. Sometimes, as they lowered themselves again upon the book, they rested in their downward flight upon the vines, and then his hand gently touched the hard, dried stems, as though he were conferring a blessing upon them. All round the sombre figure of the man flowers were blooming. Pink roses, blue and white plumbagos, sweet-scented tobacco plants, and white narcissi, raised their dainty heads to look at him, wondering, maybe, why he seemed to find his

book so much more interesting than their charming faces.

Father Giorgi's skirts were shabby and his slippers old. He wore no hat, and the sun cast little dancing beams upon his tonsure, so that it occasionally seemed to be yellow, and again almost red. His hair was very white, and his face rather unhealthy in colour. But the features and eyes were fine, and Father Giorgi was considered by most women to be extremely handsome.

Beyond the priest stood a beautiful villa, half buried in climbing plants and roses. The upper part was built of wood. Two verandas ran around it, one beneath the bedrooms and the second below the lower windows. The poles that supported the verandas were gay with the blood-red flowers of a crimson passion-flower that moved ever so slightly in the February wind. Boxes of carnations made the terrace bright, and the intoxicating smell of orange-blossoms from the various trees was wafted to the priest's nostrils. In front of the villa lay the sea. It sparkled and quivered like a gigantic mass of emeralds and sapphires massed together, and throwing out their different lights simultaneously. A small stretch of shore divided the sea from the garden-hedge of roses, so that the house stood as near its waters as any building could well be placed.

At the end of the vine-covered trellis walk rose a queer, squat-looking building of small dimensions, and bearing a black cross upon its roof. The cross was large, and quite out of proportion to the size of the

chapel. It attracted and held attention. The builder's design had been well carried out in that respect.

Down a wide gravelled path that led through borders of rose-bushes to the highroad came two ladies. Father Giorgi did not appear to see them approaching him. Slightly raising his unctuous voice, he read from his book, and looked even more reverently towards the cross facing him and the sky above him. One of the ladies gave a little cough.

'You speak to him, Dulcie,' whispered the lady who had coughed.

'I'm sure I shall not. You want the house. You speak to him yourself, Mamie,' retorted the younger of the two.

'I don't like to disturb him. Hasn't he got a heavenly face! Do say something, Dulcie, there's a dear! You know that you ought to exercise your French all you can. Say good-morning. Then he'll turn round.'

Thus exhorted, the younger woman took a couple of uncertain steps towards Father Giorgi. She was a charming-looking girl, and as sweet to look upon as the roses near her.

The priest was so absorbed in his devotions that he still failed to see her. The elder woman, a slim, energetic body, showily dressed, and wearing a great many massive gold bracelets upon her small wrists, rushed impetuously to Father Giorgi's side with a loud rustle of silken skirts.

'I beg your pardon,' said she in a brisk, cheery tone. 'But I saw by the board outside that a villa is to be let. Is this the house?'

Father Giorgi gave a little jump, brought his fine eyes down from their contemplation of the sky, and rested them in a wondering fashion upon the lady's pretty, pert face. As he still seemed to be mentally up in the clouds, his visitor promptly produced a card-case.

'Mrs. Chalmers—Mrs. *Lionel* Chalmers,' said she. 'I am very sorry to have disturbed you—awfully sorry! But it is said upon the board that inquiries were to be made here, and seeing you——'

The priest stopped her flow of apologies by raising his hand deprecatingly, and by making Mrs. Chalmers a very low and exceedingly stately bow. Then, suddenly observing the handsome girl in the background, he executed a second bow.

'Pray do not apologize,' said he in a low, rich voice. 'Yes, it is my humble dwelling yonder that I am anxious to let. I have many poor souls dependent upon me for bread. It is for them that I desire to gain a little money. Will madame inspect the house? The gardens she can see afterwards.'

'I shall be delighted,' Mrs. Chalmers replied. 'The grounds are most captivating; and, then, the position of the house is unique, and so well situated. It is quite near the Casino and the railway, and yet it seems to be hidden from prying eyes. If your terms are not too high, I feel sure that I shall become your tenant.'

Father Giorgi took no seeming notice of Mrs. Chalmers' words. In silence he led the ladies into the house, and showed them in succession a comfortably furnished dining-room, two sitting-rooms, and a morning-room. Mrs. Chalmers grew more and more en-

raptured. They passed from one apartment to another, and everything still continued to charm both women, until, entering one bedroom, Mrs. Chalmers gave a little gasping cry, and pointed to a niche in the wall facing the bed. A plaster statue of the Virgin, decorated with fresh flowers, and wearing a chaplet of white beads around her thin, meagre neck, filled it. Over the head of the statue hung a black picture-frame. It was empty, the canvas having been roughly torn away, as clinging shreds of the material testified mutely.

‘Oh, what an ugly thing to have in a room!’ she cried. ‘And why has the portrait, or whatever the subject was, been torn out of that frame?’

‘Hush!’ Dulcie Ferrars murmured warningly. ‘You forget that it is customary in all Roman Catholic households to have a statue of the Virgin in the sleeping apartments. You may make him angry if you call it “ugly.”’

Father Giorgi did not look angry, however. Meekly folding his hands, he inclined before the statue, and then made the sign of the cross rapidly upon his chest.

‘The picture was the portrait of a saint,’ he replied. ‘It was stolen for its great value by a thief. The frame has been left in its original position because it was once blessed by the Pope. It must not be removed if madame hires my house. Madame will understand,’ added the priest blandly, ‘that to us Roman Catholics the blessing of our Father renders whatever he may deign to consecrate holy in our sight.’

‘Yes, yes, of course,’ Mrs. Chalmers exclaimed hurriedly. ‘Pray forgive me. It startled me rather.

There is an uncanny look about the empty frame. And it is in the very best bedroom, too,' she added in an aggrieved manner. 'The views from these windows are much finer than those to be seen from the others.'

'It is a lovely room,' said Dulcie, walking to the window and out upon the veranda. 'Oh, Mamie, do come and look!'

'If I *do* take the house, I shall move that awful frame!' declared Mrs. Chalmers, as she joined her friend. She turned round with a start. Father Giorgi had followed her, and was standing at her elbow.

She could not tell if he had overheard her, nor yet if he understood English. He had spoken to her in French. Mrs. Chalmers looked hard at his grave face. It remained impassive. She concluded that he had comprehended nothing whatever of her speech.

'I like the house,' she said deliberately. 'It pleases me very much. What are your terms for the season?'

Father Giorgi opened his book of devotions and gazed at its pages. Without raising his eyes, he replied, 'Thirty pounds.'

Mrs. Chalmers gasped, looked at Dulcie and then at the priest.

'I mean for the season—four months, perhaps,' she explained.

Father Giorgi nodded.

'Madame will be at liberty to stay as long as she pleases. Should she go away before her term has expired, I reserve the right to relet the house. I do not, however, anticipate that madame will leave early.

The house is dry and good. But last year my poor people were sadly in need of help, and I being very poor'—he glanced significantly at his shabby, rusty garments and worn shoes—'I let the house to Miladi Graham. The season was wet, and Miladi soon left. I found another tenant, for, indeed, I have but my dwelling to bring me in money for my children. The weather is favourable this year, as the great abundance of flowers testifies. Probably madame will remain until the end of June, as the position of the house renders it cool and pleasant.'

'Does the garden belong to the tenant, *everything* in the garden?' demanded Mrs. Chalmers.

'All that the garden contains is at madame's disposal. It is well stocked with vegetables, and my own servant is an excellent gardener.'

'And there is plenty of linen, and everything that is necessary?'

'There is an abundance of all that madame will require,' replied Father Giorgi blandly.

Mrs. Chalmers hesitated a moment, her eyes sparkling with delight. She belonged to that class of women who frequent drapers' sales and invest in odd lengths of hideous material because they are cheap, but for which they usually have no use. Her maid profited by this weakness of her mistress.

'I should like to see the garden,' Mrs. Chalmers said.

Father Giorgi led the way from the veranda, and Mrs. Chalmers, bending close to Dulcie's ear, murmured:

'Oh, my dear, what a bargain! A great house and

garden at this time of the year, and in such a place as Monte Carlo, for so small a sum ! How very lucky we are !

In the garden, upon the outskirts of the vine-covered tunnel that led to the chapel, Father Giorgi paused.

‘The only thing in my poor house and grounds that does *not* belong to madame, should she decide to take Villa Franciosy, is the chapel yonder and this little walk. These vines are dedicated to Our Lady, and I live in the chapel. I shall not molest madame, nor incommode her in the slightest way. It will be as though I am not here. It is understood that madame and her friends will never seek to enter the chapel, any more than I should intrude in the house that is madame’s home for a certain period of time.’

‘I shall be only too glad to have you near us,’ answered Mrs. Chalmers ; ‘for my friend Miss Ferrars and I are quite alone until my brother joins us. I hope he will come soon, for, though I am by no means a nervous person, it is more cheerful to see a man about.’

Then they went over the grounds, and Mrs. Chalmers growing more and more delighted, and Dulcie sharing her rapture with everything they saw, Mrs. Chalmers became the tenant of Villa Franciosy for the moderate sum of thirty pounds.

PART II.

‘By Jove ! you have got hold of a real, genuine, out-and-out bargain this time, and no mistake about it,’ exclaimed Dick Godman to his sister, Mrs. Chalmers.

Dick had just come over from England, and, having prepared himself to find Villa Franciosy a failure, was most agreeably disappointed at finding it seemingly perfect. Mrs. Chalmers sighed, and exchanged a rapid glance with Dulcie. Miss Ferrars' charming face was paler, and there were black circles beneath her pretty eyes. Dick speedily observed these signs of fatigue.

'Dulcie looks rather washed out,' said he a little anxiously. 'Has she been going it a bit too much?'

Dulcie flushed rosily. Her fingers made an imperative motion towards Mrs. Chalmers behind Dick's back.

'It's the late hours,' explained Mrs. Chalmers in a flurried tone. 'We go to the Casino every night, and afterwards there is generally a dance somewhere or the other. We are late birds in this part of the world, Dick.'

'But you were never very early ones at home,' said he.

They were standing in the dining-room looking out at the sea. Dick had arrived that morning in time for lunch.

'I think it's the heat,' Dulcie murmured, as Dick looked tenderly at her. 'It has been very warm here ever since we came. I am quite well, and I have only lost a few pounds at the tables, so it is not my losses that are preying upon my mind.'

She laughed nervously, and, edging nearer to Mrs. Chalmers, whispered:

'If you breathe *one* word to him, Mamie, I'll never forgive you—never.'

‘I won’t say anything,’ Mrs. Chalmers replied.

‘Is that the old man?’ Dick asked, indicating with a jerk of his hand the imposing form of Father Giorgi, walking beneath the vines. ‘He must be a simple-minded old fossil to let such a house as this for so insignificant a sum. Has he no idea of the value of money?’

‘Oh, he only wants money for his poor people,’ Mrs. Chalmers replied, craning her neck in order to obtain a better view of the priest; ‘I really believe that if I had offered him fifteen pounds he would have accepted it. I wish,’ she added with a soft sigh, ‘that he was not quite so unapproachable. He never speaks to us, or enters the house. I never knew a man so distant as he is.’

‘He shows shocking bad taste in not seeking to cultivate your acquaintance,’ said Dick, trying hard to meet Dulcie’s eyes.

She refused to look at him, and drummed absently with her slim fingers upon the window-panes.

‘I’ll take you up to your room,’ Mrs. Chalmers said. ‘We’ve generously given you the best in the house, and the views from the windows are superb.’

‘And you’ve got a lovely statue of the Virgin, and a picture-frame that has been blessed by the Pope,’ cried Dulcie. ‘So you won’t feel lonely, you know.’

She looked after them with a smile as they went from the room. The smile died away when she was alone, and a look of terror crept into her pale face.

She was still staring sadly at the window, when Dick came hastily into the room.

‘Oh, Dulcie!’ he cried reproachfully, ‘I have been looking forward so much to meeting you again. Have you changed, dear, in your feeling for me? Has a new admirer supplanted the old boy-lover?’

Dulcie turned paler. A gray shadow spread over her cheeks. In the clear light Dick noticed the little fine lines around her lips and eyes.

‘You are worried,’ he exclaimed. ‘Something has gone wrong. Have faith in me, Dulcie. Tell me what has made you so cold and distant. Have you forgotten your promise to give me an answer to that question I asked you in England?’

‘No, no,’ she said, so low that he had to bend to catch the words. ‘I cannot say anything to you now. To-morrow, after—after—you have been here a night or two.’

He tried to take her hand. She drew it away, and ran quickly from the room. Dick looked towards the open door with a puzzled expression in his honest gray eyes.

‘What on earth ails them both?’ he asked himself. ‘Mamie does nothing but sigh and groan, and hasn’t a word to say in praise of her last wonderful bargain, and Dulcie is certainly ill and unhappy. I can’t get a word of explanation from either of ’em.’

A dark shadow suddenly falling across the sunlit room made him turn his head. Father Giorgi was passing the veranda, book in hand, on his way down to the sea. His black garments made the only sombre spot in the gay picture.

Dick drew back with a muttered exclamation.

‘I shouldn’t be surprised,’ said he, ‘but what that old fellow has been trying to convert ’em both to the Church of Rome. Sailors say that priests never fail to bring bad luck with them!’

Then he laughed, cast a glance at his handsome reflection in the mirror, and jingled the coins in his pocket quite cheerfully.

The inmates of Villa Franciosy returned home late from the Casino that evening. Dulcie had been very quiet during the day. She avoided Dick, and he, seeing that his society was distasteful to her, was careful to leave her alone. Dick was thoroughly tired with his previous journey and the long day. It seemed to him that his head had hardly touched the pillow before he was sound asleep. He was awakened by a grating sound, followed by that peculiar sensation of not being alone in the room, that is sometimes experienced by nervous people.

Turning quickly over upon his back he uttered a cry, and then rubbed his eyes. The statue in the niche opposite was bathed in a flood of green-yellow light. The large impassive face, with its painted eyes, seemed to smile at him mockingly. He saw the faded brown flowers upon the head, and the rosary round its neck.

Dick drew in his breath, staring stupidly at the figure. He thought that the head moved. And then came utter darkness. The light had faded completely away, and the pale outline of the statue alone was visible in the gloom.

‘It’s all nonsense!’ said Dick with a gasp. ‘It’s

Mamie playing some idiotic schoolgirl trick. *Mamie* at the respectable age of thirty !

He laughed, turned composedly over again, pulled the pillow into a comfortable angle, and tried to sleep. Again he heard the grating sound, and looked towards the figure, fully expecting to see it once more illumined. It still remained shadowy, but over its head the green-yellow light was dancing, like some fanciful Will-o'-the-wisp. Higher and higher it went, resting at last upon the empty picture frame. It was empty no longer. From the black frame a horrible, ghastly travesty of a human face leered and grinned demoniacally at Dick.

He saw the hollow socket of the eyes, and the leaping flames that flickered from their dark caverns. The distended mouth was awful, and represented nothing human. The sunken, pallid cheeks, with their sharp jaws, the pinched blueness of the whole face, suggested some inhabitant of a graveyard sent back to revisit the world that it had once occupied.

Until that night Dick had never regarded himself in the light of a superstitious or nervous person. His forehead and hands grew damp. He felt as though drops of ice-cold water were being slowly trickled down his back, and this sensation was accompanied by a feeling of almost babyish weakness that glued him to the bed, and that kept his eyes fixed fearfully upon the apparition.

Once more the light vanished, plunging the room into utter darkness.

Dick's courage returned now. Springing from the bed, he lit a candle, slipped on his dressing-gown, and, approaching the statue, stared curiously into its sim-

pering face. He touched it, and satisfied himself that it was actually made of plaster. Pulling down the empty frame with a jerk, he tossed it angrily into a corner. A little shoal of dust fell as he moved it ; a cobweb hung limply from one of its corners. Dick lit a second candle, and hunted for his pipe and tobacco. Both were downstairs, and he went in search of them.

The house was very silent. From one apartment upon the same landing a light gleamed. As Dick passed the door, he fancied that a sound of half-stifled sobbing came from the room. Who was it that wept in the stillness of the night? Was it Mamie, or was it *Dulcie*? Dick found his tobacco, and stole back softly to his room. A cry of amazement fell from his lips. *The frame that he had thrown into a corner hung now in its original position above the statue!*

Dick sat down, filled his pipe, lit it, and puffed away with savage energy. Had he really removed the frame, or had he simply been the victim of a dream? The frame could not have been rehung without hands. Somebody must have been concealed in the room, and had effected an escape during his short absence, unless——

Springing to his feet, Dick commenced a thorough investigation of each article of furniture. His own garments hung loosely from the pegs of the one small wardrobe. No person could possibly creep beneath the French bedstead, and the same thing held good respecting the chest of drawers. The lace curtains could hide no living form. There was absolutely no place of concealment in the bedroom.

‘Well, I’m blessed!’ exclaimed Dick.

He returned for comfort to his pipe, and tried hard to convince himself that the whole thing had been hallucination. But there was dust upon his hands from his contact with the frame, and in the corner where he had so contemptuously thrown it a cobweb and a little heap of yellow powder bore silent witness to the fact that the frame had lain there.

Looking around him, he became aware for the first time of evidences of a woman’s presence. A photograph of an old school-fellow of Dulcie’s smiled from the mantelpiece, a dainty but utterly useless writing-desk held the place of honour upon a table, and a wall-pocket filled with letters of various tints hung above it. Had Dulcie occupied this room? Had she been terrified, and was her present nervous, ailing condition the result? Or was it only Mamie and a practical joke?

He sat up so long thinking the matter over that he was late down in the morning. When he entered the breakfast-room, Mrs. Chalmers was sitting near the window reading a paper. Dulcie was absent.

‘Did you have a good night, dear?’ Mrs. Chalmers asked.

There was nothing extraordinary in the question, but it seemed to Dick that his sister’s tone was peculiarly anxious.

‘Not very,’ he answered.

He came to her side and gently knocked down the paper she held like a screen before her face.

‘Why did you turn Dulcie out of her bedroom?’

he asked. 'There are others unoccupied, aren't there?'

'There is only one that has a *good* bed,' said Mrs. Chalmers hurriedly, 'and Dulcie wanted to change. She thought you would like that bedroom. How did you know it had been hers? She asked me not to tell you.'

'There are odd things about the mantelpiece that made me think Dulcie had used the room,' Dick replied. He took a stride across the floor, and returned to the window. 'I say,' he said, 'do you happen to have a lumber-room in the place?'

Mrs. Chalmers opened her eyes.

'No. Why?'

'I should like to put that empty picture-frame away somewhere. It's an ugly thing to look at, and it causes one to have bad dreams. That's all.'

'Did you have bad dreams?'

It was Dulcie who spoke. Entering the room noiselessly, she had overheard Dick's last words. Her face was eager, and her eyes shone with an unnatural brightness.

'Horrid!' Dick declared emphatically. 'I never passed such a night in all my life. You don't look well, Dulcie,' he said in quite a different tone of voice. 'Did you have a sleepless night, too?'

For answer, Dulcie sank down into the nearest chair, and, covering her face with her hands, burst into tears. 'Oh, Dick!' she panted, 'I am so glad you have seen that terrible face! I was afraid that I was going insane. You know that Aunt Lottie has always said that dad

died raving mad ! It has been preying upon me, and lately the horror has made my life a burden. I have been so frightened—oh, so frightened !

Dick went to her, drew her head upon his shoulder, and kissed her.

‘Poor little soul !’ said he soothingly. ‘So that was why you treated me so badly, was it ? Your father wasn’t mad, dear. I know all about his death. Just you tell me what you have seen and heard in that mysterious room.’

When he had heard all that Dulcie had to tell him, he went out upon the veranda and looked up at the windows of his bedroom. The passion-flower was torn in several places. But there had been no wind during the night.

After breakfast Dick shut himself up in his bedroom, and was invisible nearly all day.

* * * * *

‘There’s nothing to be afraid of,’ said Dick genially to the two trembling women who sat with him and the servants in the darkness of the haunted room about a week later ; ‘we are going to lay the ghost. Nothing more.’

Mrs. Chalmers crept closer to Dulcie, and did her best to still the chattering of her teeth. A clock upon the landing struck two.

Almost at the same moment came the grating sound that Dick had heard once before. Then followed a faint cry that seemed to proceed from the statue itself.

In a moment the numerous candles in the room were lit, and, pushing aside the statue, Dick slid back

a panel in the wall, revealing a narrow passage and Father Giorgi struggling to escape from the embraces of a tar-barrel.

He looked so infinitely miserable and dejected that everyone laughed. Dick left him to the mercy of the indignant servants, and took Dulcie and Mrs. Chalmers away.

‘But why——’ began Mrs. Chalmers.

‘Why? you goose! Because he finds it pays. He lets and relets the villa. People get scared and leave in a hurry, and so many visitors come each year who have never heard of the bad reputation of Villa Franciosy that he finds no difficulty in letting his precious house. I thought the phosphoric light and the ghastly Japanese mask savoured of Father Giorgi, and several hours spent in the seclusion of the haunted room soon verified my belief. The outer wall is of wood, as you know. There’s a sliding panel in it like the one at the back of the statue, and a small trap-door behind the picture-frame. The old hypocrite climbed up the columns of the lower veranda. A bargain indeed!’ exclaimed Dick, in an explosion of mirth. ‘You’ve got one this time, Mamie.’

Mrs. Dick Godman is very proud of her husband. In her eyes the laying of the ghost was the most clever performance, and not to be equalled by any ordinary mortal.

THE LAST ELEGY.

PART I.

BARNEY FLANNAGAN sat at an open window of the little sitting-room, and stared moodily out at the sea. An immense flock of kittiwakes had just risen from their resting position upon the water. As they flew up high in the sky, mounting and descending again and again, they looked for all the world like stars falling from a rocket, or a big shower of white paper scattering down from a balloon.

Barney appeared anxious and haggard. Two deep lines had settled themselves between his black eyebrows, and two more, equally deep, ran from his wide nostrils to the corners of his mouth.

There was a sullen, brooding expression in his small brown eyes. His hair had not been combed that morning, and his nails and linen were dirty. His well-made tweed suit needed brushing, and his white silk tie had long lost its pristine freshness. In one of Barney's stubby hands a small, green-paper-covered book was held between the thick thumb and the fourth finger. Upon its cover was printed the following title :

‘TWENTY-ONE NEVER-FAILING METHODS OF MAKING A
FORTUNE AT THE TABLES AT MONTE-CARLO.’

A table quite close to Barney's elbow bore several other pamphlets of a similar character, a pile of pin-pricked cards used by the players at the Casino to mark the various winning numbers and their colours, a fat carpet-pin provided by the Casino with the cards, and a brown note-book, kept open by a stout pencil, and well filled with memoranda.

'The Martingale's a confounded failure!' said Barney savagely. He referred to a well-known system greatly in vogue just then among the frequenters of the Casino. Barney had been practising it for some time, and it had failed to realize his expectations.

He thrust his hand through his rough hair, making it even more unkempt in appearance.

'I'll go upon Zero no more,' he continued, following up his train of thought, and speaking aloud. 'It only turned up three times all last night, and then I'd only five francs on the thing. I reckon that the non-turning up of that damned number lost me over one hundred and fifty francs. Yet, if I don't cover, I'm pretty sure to lose that way.'

A door in the room opening gave admittance to an old man, whose fine face bore a faint resemblance to Barney's. His head was grandly proportioned, and covered with long white hair, brushed back from the broad forehead, and hanging over the collar of his rusty black coat. A beard covered his chin, and fell upon his breast. The sunken blue eyes were filled with an expression of kindly benevolence that one missed in Barney, and the lips beneath the white hair were finer and more tender than those that were hidden by Barney's large heavy auburn moustache.

The centre table was laid for breakfast, and a dirty cup and plate had been pushed aside.

‘Good morning, Barney,’ said the old man, as he seated himself, and began to pour out some tea.

‘Morning,’ responded Barney, in a gruff tone.

His father stifled a sigh, and cut himself a very thin, small slice of bread. Taking up a knife, he glanced in an uncertain manner at a tiny pat of butter almost lost in a sea of glass. The knife was about to descend, when old Flannagan drew his hand hurriedly away, much in the fashion of a repentant child correcting itself of some naughty habit, and gently replaced the knife by the side of the butter-dish.

The son watched him in grim silence.

‘Oh, go on,’ cried Barney, with a harsh laugh. ‘Don’t carry economy too far and deny yourself everything. I wouldn’t, if I were you. Money can’t be carried into the grave, you know.’

‘I have none to carry away with me, Barney,’ said the old man.

Barney laughed again. Twisting himself round in his chair in order to obtain a better view of his parent’s face, he said sneeringly :

‘I’ve heard that tale before. Look here, dad, it can’t go down with me. You’d much better let me have a share of what you’ve got while you’re living. What’s the good of scraping and hoarding like this? It’ll all come to me later on.’

‘There’s nothing to come, my laddie,’ answered the old man.

‘Nonsense ! You made a tidy lump when you were

chef of that orchestra. I've heard all about it. Goodness knows you don't spend anything upon your precious old self, and I don't get much out of you.'

'You get all that I can afford to give you, Barney.'

'Then you can't afford to keep life in a fellow, that's all about it, dad.'

The old man made no answer, occupying himself with amassing the few crumbs that had fallen in the cutting of the bread. He ate them one by one, very slowly and lingeringly, as though anxious to prolong the pleasure of eating. Barney watched him with a deepening frown.

'I say,' said he, at length, 'why the dickens can't you be reasonable! Let me have a few hundreds, and I'll make your fortune for you. I've sat up all night ever since I came home from the Casino, and I've thought out a splendid idea for breaking the bank. It's a combination of a Martingale and Wells's system, with a jolly good improvement on them both of my own. It can't fail, dad;—'pon my honour, it can't!'

'I have heard you say the same thing about many previous systems that you have invented, Barney.'

Barney made a movement of impatience.

'Nobody wins at first,' said he, trying hard to speak in a persuasive, coaxing tone. 'It's only by trying, by putting one's ideas into practice, that one can expect to make money. It's a case of try, try, try again.'

Old Flannagan drained his teacup to the last drop of its contents, opened the lid of the teapot, and peered wistfully inside. It was empty. Closing the

lid with a snap, he began to hunt for more stray crumbs near the bread-plate.

‘Just look at this! cried Barney, springing up from his seat, and seizing hold of the note-book. ‘I’ve worked it out in figures, and tried it with the little roulette over there. According to this account I won eight hundred and seventy francs in three hours, beginning with a paltry capital of one hundred francs. That’s pretty good, hey?’

His father nodded, stroking his long beard, and looking at Barney with a strangely tender light in his dim eyes.

‘If I didn’t feel so confident of its turning out a real good thing, I wouldn’t ask you for such a miserable loan,’ Barney declared. ‘I’d get it from a—a—friend. But I want all the winnings to be in the family, you know, dad. I don’t see the fun of going shares with outsiders.’

‘It’s no use, Barney. I haven’t a third of the sum you need in my possession. I gave you all I had a few weeks ago.’

‘A wretched fifty francs or so,’ cried Barney indignantly. ‘A mere nothing. You had far better have kept it yourself.’

His father rose very quietly, and, crossing to his son’s side, laid one long thin hand upon the young man’s shoulder. ‘Listen, Barney,’ he said. ‘I cannot give you a single sou. It is out of my power. Nor do I regret it. The need of money may induce you to work for it, and may succeed in drawing you away from the fatal influence that the gambling-tables have thrown

over you. There is a good opening at the present moment for you, if you will only consent to accept it. My old friend, Dr. Jansen, has settled at Nice. He needs an assistant, and will welcome you with open arms in his family. Will you go to him ?

Barney had listened in sullen silence. As his father finished speaking, he wrenched his shoulder away.

‘No !’ he shouted angrily. ‘Confound Dr. Jansen ! Do you think I’m such a fool as to slave in a stinking laboratory for a pittance when I can make a fortune in a few weeks at the Casino ? Not I. If you won’t lend me the money, somebody else will. I’m not without friends.’

A look of deep despair settled upon his father’s face.

‘Can I say nothing to influence you for your good, my son ?’ he said sadly. ‘I had hoped for better things from you.’

Barney deigned no reply. Gathering together his books, he rushed from the room, slamming the door behind him.

Old Flannagan looked after his son’s retreating form with misty eyes. His hand shook as he took out his snuff-box. It had been presented to him by the members of a celebrated orchestra that he had conducted in Paris for many years. A few grains of the precious mixture with which it had been filled alone remained. He sighed as he looked at them.

‘Better keep them for a happier day—a happier day,’ he murmured to himself, as he carefully replaced the box in his waistcoat pocket.

His old violin stood in its case in the corner. He

walked up to it, and gently stroked the shabby leather.

'*You* have never disappointed me,' he said with infinite pathos in his sad voice. 'I have never had a single expectation that you have not fulfilled, my dear companion.'

For a moment or two he remained with his hand resting upon the case. Memory was carrying him back to by-gone days, when his now trembling hand had been strong and the violin had obeyed its command. He saw again the hushed, breathless audience before him, and heard once more the suppressed sobs of the women and the clamour of frantic applause that greeted him at the conclusion of his performance.

'Ah,' he whispered, 'we shall never see these times again—never again!'

A wind that had just risen crept in at the window, bringing with it a faded rose-petal. As the leaf fluttered to the old musician's feet, the breeze that had laid it there seemed to echo his words :

'Never again!'

PART II.

'WELL?' asked the woman eagerly.

She stood in the atrium of the Casino, right at the end, beneath the window. No one was near except Barney. He looked more untidy, and even more haggard. There was a wild, strained, furtive expression in his bloodshot eyes. The woman was young, hard of feature, and cold-eyed. She was painted, and she wore a gay pink satin gown and a profusion of

jewels. An enormous picture hat of black velvet rested anyhow upon her untidy mass of light frizzed hair. She represented a type of woman only to be met with at Monte Carlo.

Barney shivered, though the evening was hot and oppressive.

‘Don’t speak so loudly,’ he said savagely. ‘Someone may hear you.’

‘There’s no one near, you stupid boy! And if there was, who would understand?’ she demanded, laying her hand affectionately upon his arm.

He shook her away, and glanced uneasily around the well-lit room.

‘*He’s* going fast,’ he whispered, bending to speak in her ear. ‘I can see a change in him every day. His nose is pinched, and his skin looks blue. To-day I was afraid that he suspected me.’

His voice, that had begun in a low whisper, fell lower and lower until it died away. Again he looked behind him and shuddered.

‘Nonsense! You want a pick-me-up. Why should he suspect you?’

‘I’ve been rather a drain upon him. And he knows how much I’d give to have a fling with his money. Curse the money! I wish I’d never begun this—this *thing!*’

The woman frowned, then laughed a harsh, forced laugh.

‘Pooh!’ said she airily. ‘Old men have no business to hang on, especially when they’re such horrid misers as he is. If he’d only treated you fair and square, you’d have had no need for getting rid of——’

Barney stopped her utterance. His face had grown livid, and his teeth chattered.

‘Do you want to hang me?’ he cried hoarsely. ‘Can’t you keep quiet?’

‘There’s no necessity for you to be so bad-tempered,’ she said, in an offended manner. ‘It isn’t I who want the money. You’re doing it for your own interest. And I maintain that you’re perfectly in the right. The money must come to you some day. You had far better have it while you’re young, and your brain is in its full working power. Just think,’ she murmured, creeping nearer to him, ‘what you can do with it, even if it is only a few thousand pounds! With your system you can’t fail to make a fortune. It seems very hard that you should be crippled for want of funds. If he had only been reasonable it would never have happened. He’s brought it on himself.’

‘Yes, he’s brought it on himself,’ cried Barney feverishly. ‘It’s all his own fault.’

He repeated the words to himself as he went down the Casino steps, and across the street. They seemed to afford him a chill kind of pleasure, and they were still running in his head when he entered the poorly-furnished sitting-room of the house that he and his father occupied.

Old Flannagan was seated at the table with his violin in his hands. He glanced up with a smile as Barney entered.

‘Any luck?’ he asked pleasantly.

Barney turned his eyes away from his father’s pinched

and pallid face. In spite of all his efforts to control their wandering, they rested upon a jug near his father's elbow.

'None,' he replied curtly.

A spasm flitted across old Flannagan's features. He passed his hand over his face as though to conceal its twitching. But Barney saw the movement.

'Feel bad?' he demanded.

'Not a bit! Wonderfully well—never felt better in all my life. This weather makes me very thirsty, though—very thirsty, Barney.'

Barney watched his father pour out a glass of lemonade from the jug. The old man drank it slowly, smacking his lips after each mouthful of the beverage.

'It is a most refreshing drink,' he said, and pushed the jug across to his son.

Barney shook his head. Beads of moisture were standing upon his forehead. His hands felt clammy.

'Talking of luck,' said old Flannagan, as he lightly touched the responsive strings of his instrument, 'I've had a slice to-day. The director of the Casino orchestra has consented to let me play a solo this evening. It is very kind of him, isn't it, Barney?'

Barney stared at his father in open-eyed amazement.

'Play a solo! *You!*' he exclaimed.

A deep flush crept into the old man's thin cheeks. A sparkle illumined his dim eyes as he raised his head.

'We are not quite worn out yet, my violin and I,' he said with dignity. 'And there is still a little fire left in both of us—both of us, Barney.'

‘Oh, I don’t doubt that,’ Barney muttered. ‘You’re good for a long time yet, dad.’

‘Hey, hey — a long time,’ his father repeated childishly. ‘Who can tell? I may outlive you. Barney. I shall have to leave my fortune to a charity then ; I should like to benefit some society that interested itself in helping struggling young musicians and worn-out old men. if I could — if I could, Barney.’

‘You can leave it to whom you like, for all I care. I don’t want a farthing!’ retorted Barney in an irritable tone.

Laying the violin very tenderly upon the table, old Flannagan took from a peg a well-worn, soft felt hat. Barney noticed the persistent trembling of his father’s hand.

‘Look here.’ he said brusquely, ‘you’d better give up this idea of playing. I don’t believe your nerve is good.’

‘It has been very bad for some time past,’ the old man answered. ‘But it is better now, and it will be better still to-morrow.’

Barney’s overcoat hung beneath the hat. Old Flannagan took it down, and handed it to Barney.

‘It’s a very chilly night,’ he said. ‘You had better wrap up well, Barney ; I should like you to hear me play, just to convince you that some of the old ones equal the young men.’

‘Oh, I’ll come, if you like,’ said Barney. He was cold. His hands felt like ice when they encountered his father’s as the old man helped him into his coat.

‘You’re not well ; you are shivering,’ his father

cried anxiously. 'There is a little brandy somewhere—will you have it? There's not much, but it will keep the cold out.'

Barney drew back with a hasty movement. His bloodshot eyes fell beneath his father's direct gaze.

'No—o,' he stammered. 'I'm all right. Come on.'

'If you're quite sure that you won't have it, I'll take it,' said his father, producing a large bottle containing an infinitesimal quantity of brandy.

Barney watched him drink it. A look of relief came into his face as his father picked up the violin.

The sky was spangled with stars when they crossed to the Casino. The palms and eucalyptus-trees stood clearly defined against the blue canopy. A rosy flush still lingered in the horizon, marking the spot where the sun had sunk to rest.

Old Flannagan held his head high. He stepped out briskly, so briskly that a showily-dressed woman in pink, standing near the artistes' entrance, turned her head to look after him as he passed into the green-room. Her eyes met Barney's. They were filled with reproach, and said as plainly as though her tongue had made the coarse utterance:

'You liar!'

But once in the green-room, among the members of the orchestra, the life died out of the old man's face. They were all known to him, these skilled musicians, and they in return were well aware of his past triumphs. He looked so aged and wan, so dejected and ill, crouching miserably in a lonely corner, that the men began

to whisper among themselves, and to doubt if he was capable of carrying out his part of the programme.

‘Be ready to take his place if he gives in,’ said their *chef* to the first violin. ‘You know the thing he’s going to play. It’s No. 4 an old favourite of his.’

The first violin nodded, and went on rolling a cigarette. Old Flannagan was hugging his violin.

‘You have never failed me,’ he muttered to it. ‘Don’t fail me now, my only friend.’

He followed with the rest of the men when they trooped solemnly into the heavily-decorated theatre, and took a side-seat on the stage where he was unseen by the audience. He sat there, perfectly motionless, with his eyes closed and his hands clasped over his violin, while the orchestra rattled splendidly through the first number. He made no sign, not even when No. 3 was ended and the placard had been changed. The *chef* exchanged a glance of intelligence with the first fiddle. Someone touched Flannagan upon the arm.

‘It’s your turn, old man — your solo. They’re putting a chair for you in the front.’

He opened his eyes and looked vacantly into the face of the man who addressed him. A roar of applause echoing through the building made him quiver. The audience were demanding an encore of No. 3, but he believed himself to be back among his own men, and thought that this frantic clapping of hands and stamping of feet was for him. He rose, and walked blindly forward, stumbling over one man’s foot, and catching his own in the skirts of the pretty harpist.

The audience became quiet at sight of the venerable-

looking old man with the handsome white head. There was a sharp rustling of programmes. People asked each other who Flannagan was. For a second or two the old musician stared stupidly in front of him, with an expression of childish imbecility upon his drawn features. He did not see the crowd of expectant faces turned towards him. A blue mist, tinged with red, floated hazily before his tired eyes. As he stood there, a sad, pathetic figure among the younger men, someone entered the theatre, and was shown a seat by one of the liveried attendants.

It was his son Barney. At sight of him a thrill ran through every fibre of the father's body. It was as though he had touched an electric battery. He looked at Barney, and looking remembered.

Raising his hand, he brought the bow down boldly upon the violin.

'Speak, speak!' he said to it, and the instrument obeyed.

As the first wailing notes rang through the building, Barney experienced a sensation of extreme uneasiness. His hands felt damp. He fumbled for his handkerchief to wipe them. For many years he had not given a single thought to his mother—the little mother who had died just as her only child was entering manhood. Why did the plaintive music recall her to him now? He could not tell, struggling hard to shake off the remorse that devoured his heart.

'Look after your dear father, Barney. You and he will be all alone now—comfort him, my boy.'

Was it the violin that uttered these words, or had

his dying mother whispered them to him a long while ago? Barney mopped his pallid face. His head felt as though an iron ring was cutting into the temples.

Sadder and sadder sounded the music. Now it was like the tired sobbing of a tiny child, and now the sweet voice of a woman mourning for her lost ones. Then it grew capricious, and told of fading sunsets and vain regrets and withered hopes. It found its way into the innermost recesses of worldly hearts, and awoke a restless pain, an unsatisfied hunger never to be soothed or appeased by mortals. Visions of lonely graves, dead loves, and forgotten faces sprang up like spectres beneath the touch of the old man's hand, and faces paled and hearts beat quicker as the music grew wilder and wilder and still more sorrowful, telling now with plaintive pathos of a heart that was broken by the ingratitude of an only son.

The old musician looked inspired. His eyes were bright. His long white hair hung around his neck in wild disorder. It seemed to Barney that his father's eyes were riveted upon his face. The son's anguish deepened, for now the violin was speaking directly to him.

'I know! I know!' it said; and it laughed as it repeated the words like a creature possessed.

Barney looked fearfully at his neighbours. Surely they must hear the awful story that the violin was telling! He wanted to rush from his seat, and he could not move a hand or a foot. He tried to scream out to someone to stop the music, but his dry lips refused to form the request.

‘Farewell, farewell!’ sobbed the violin, as the last notes died lingeringly away.

A thunder of applause shook the building. Then the violin dropped from the player’s hand, and he fell heavily into the arms of the nearest musician.

A doctor rushed from the audience to his assistance, and the old man was carried from the platform.

‘He’s dead!’ The excitement was too much for him,’ one of the men whispered to another. ‘He’s played his last elegy.’

‘I’d have given ten years of my life to have played like that,’ his companion replied enviously.

Then No. 4 was taken away, and No. 5 substituted. The *chef* swung his baton, but there was not a dry eye in the orchestra.

* * * * *

Barney’s hands trembled as they rifled the contents of his father’s desk. It was a shabby article of furniture, and greatly the worse for wear, like its owner, who lay silently in the police depot awaiting an inquest.

Barney was anxious to escape with such property as he could find before his crime was discovered. At present the general opinion was that his father had died of heart disease. Barney knew only too well that the doctors would not join in that impression, and that they could not fail to remove it.

In one of the many narrow drawers of the bureau Barney found a fat bundle tied up very carefully and sealed, as though it contained papers of great importance.

'Securities,' whispered Barney, trying hard to still the chattering of his teeth.

He cut the sealed string, and turned up the wick of the lamp. A great number of letters fell from the cover, together with a few newspaper-cuttings. His ashen cheeks grew more gray as he looked at them. They were his own boyish letters to his father, written from school. And the cuttings, saved with such loving pride, referred to prizes won, and distinctions gained in the cricket-field or at football. His photograph, taken when he was a child, stared at him from the table. The round cheeks and smiling eyes met Barney's regard reprovingly.

'See what you were *once*,' they seemed to say.

With a savage gesture Barney tore the photograph into fragments, and dashed them upon the floor.

He found no papers of value, no money. His hopes of discovering rolls of bank-notes and fat bags of coins died gradually away. The bureau contained receipted bills, personal memoranda, his mother's love-letters—faded, but still retaining a faint odour of lavender in the yellow pages—rolls of music, and worthless trifles. Nothing more.

'He's hidden *it* somewhere in the furniture,' said Barney to himself, his bloodshot eyes roaming searchingly over the room.

They fell at once upon a letter placed over the clock on the chimney-piece. In his anxiety to rifle the bureau he had not observed the white envelope before. Taking it down, Barney saw that it was addressed in his father's handwriting to his friend at Nice, Dr. Jansen.

‘This may tell me something,’ Barney muttered. A thought sent the blood tingling through his veins. What if his father had communicated his suspicions to the doctor?

To tear the envelope was the work of a second. A sheet of paper containing a few words was inclosed. And this was what the murdered man had written :

‘DEAR JANSEN,

‘Before this reaches you I shall be dead. [The papers quivered in Barney’s fingers like an aspen-leaf in a strong wind.] I am weary of living, and have been poisoning myself with arsenic for some time. *I wish you to produce this letter in order to exonerate any person who may be suspected of causing my death.* God be with you, my old friend.

‘B. FLANNAGAN.

‘P.S.—You kindly offered to do what you could for my dear son. Will you interest yourself in his welfare? As you know, our only means of subsistence, my life annuity, dies with me, leaving him penniless.’

HOW DONALD CHARTERIS SAVED HIS WIFE.

PROEM.

THERE was an endless sound of money chinking in the large room, so that by listening only for that one musical noise you failed to catch the rustling of garments, the opening of doors, and the hubbub of many voices.

The four tables were crowded with gamblers and sightseers. There was not a vacant seat in the gaily decorated apartment. The round seat in the middle of the room, with its lofty pyramid of flowering plants and graceful palms, was packed with people anxiously waiting for a vacant place at one of the tables, or the arrival of a friend who was staking for them.

Every now and then one caught an eager whisper of, 'How much did you go that time?' followed occasionally by a delighted laugh, but more often by a sigh of impatience or an exclamation of angry disappointment. It was frightfully hot. The women seated at the tables looked flushed and hard of expression. It was pitiful to see with what hunger they drew in their winnings, and with what bitter despair they watched the croupiers raking in their lost stakes.

Many of them had bouquets of large Nice violets lying before them in company with a handkerchief, a bag, and a pile of papers. The flowers looked almost as artificial as the faces that bent so anxiously over the green cloth.

At one of the centre tables a man and a woman stood side by side looking on at the drama that unfolded itself before their eyes. The man was small of stature, fair, and very round-shouldered. He looked ill, and even if you had not heard his hollow cough, nor seen the frequency with which he pressed one long thin hand to his side, you would have declared him to be consumptive. His companion was slender, pale, and emaciated. There was a pathetic expression in her gray eyes and an odd primness in her dress.

She also was ill. Though she did not cough, it was too evident that she and the man were fellow-sufferers, and that the same cruel malady had fastened itself upon her. The wistful look in her eyes deepened as she watched a stout, showily-dressed woman gather up a handful of yellow coins from the table. Her breath came and went like the fluttering of an imprisoned bird against the bars of its cage.

‘Oh, John!’ she exclaimed aloud.

The man sighed, looked in an uncertain manner at the woman who had just won the heap of gold, and slipped his hand in his pocket.

He was very poor, and their funds were nearly exhausted. When the money was quite gone, foggy England and death stared them in the face—unless he could win a large sum to enable them to remain in the warm climate.

‘Shall I try, Mary?’ he asked in a hoarse whisper. His wife’s eyes shone. But she was still timid.

‘Let us wait a little longer,’ she said with a tremor in her low voice. ‘It is all so strange, and I can’t understand a word that the croupiers say. If only we knew French, John!’

Again the stout woman placed a pile of louis upon the red diamond at the end of the table. Again she won, and once more the husband and wife glanced questioningly at each other.

‘It looks very easy,’ murmured the man. ‘Half of the sum that she has won would enable us to stay here for a long time, Mary.’

He drew his hand from his pocket. A five-franc piece was held between the finger and thumb.

‘The red diamond?’ he asked, his lips twitching and his deeply-sunken eyes blinking with nervous excitement.

As he pushed forward, trying to reach over the heads of the people seated before him, a gentle touch drew him back, and a soft voice whispered imperatively :

‘Don’t!’

The little man turned with a start and a quickening of his pulses. His wife was at his side, and behind them stood a tall woman dressed entirely in black. She made no sign of recognition, but he felt that her eyes were fixed upon him through the veil that covered her face.

For a moment they stood staring at each other. Then the man drew his wife’s hand through his arm.

‘It is very oppressive here,’ he said with a pant. ‘Let us go home.’

‘Oh, John!’ his wife cried almost reproachfully,

‘won’t you try, after all? Think what it means for us both if you win!’

‘Another time, dear,’ he replied—‘another time.’

As they passed from the salon to the atrium, John Lane looked over his shoulder. The woman in black was following them.

‘What can it mean?’ he asked himself in perplexity.

He knew that she was still behind them when they reached their poor lodgings. From the window of their one room he looked out, and thought that he saw a dark figure near the house opposite. A cry from his wife caused him to turn in surprise.

‘Look, John, look! A letter and a parcel! Who can have left them? Do open them and see!’

He opened the letter. Looking over his shoulder, this is what his wife read:

‘A friend who is anxious to place temptation out of your reach, begs you to accept the contents of the parcel that you will find in your room with this letter. Only two stipulations are made. One is that you never enter the Casino again; the second is that you go to Cannes. May the money bring you health, and prove a blessing to you! If these conditions are agreeable to you, place a light in your window.’

The husband and wife gasped. Mary had already unfastened the parcel. A shower of gold and notes lay upon the shabby table.

‘Oh, my dear, my dear!’ she sobbed. ‘We shall get well and strong now, John! God bless our kind friend who has saved us!’

When a light shone feebly from the window indicated, the figure of a woman in black stole softly away,

and out of the street. At the corner another woman was waiting. She was dressed in a nursing costume of coarse material.

‘Will you join us to-night, my sister?’ she asked in French.

The woman in black threw up her veil. Tears were running down her wasted face.

‘I can bring you no money,’ she said faintly. ‘I am penniless. If you take me, you take a pauper.’

‘They who come to us with willing hearts and helpful hands bring us greater riches than gold,’ the Sister answered. ‘For the greatest of all is Love.’

The woman in black cast a glance back at the street that she had quitted.

‘Oh, Don! dear Don!’ she murmured. ‘It is all that I can do, darling—it is all that I can do. Look down and forgive me, dear!’

‘Look!’ said the Sister, pointing with one pale hand skyward.

A brilliant meteor had flashed for one brief second into sight. The woman in black uttered a low cry, and stood with bowed head. Then, holding out her hand, she said in a faint whisper :

‘Take me, my Sister.’

Hand-in-hand the two figures passed into the sombre blackness of the night. The door of a large building with a cross upon its roof opened to admit them. Upon its threshold the woman in black turned to give one last look at the world that she was leaving behind. Then she crossed the lintel, and so vanished from all who had known and loved her—for ever.

THE STORY.

WHEN poor Donald Charteris first grew ill in England his doctor sent him into Cornwall. The village that had been recommended for its salubrious climate was inhabited chiefly by fisher folk. It was filled with picturesque red-roofed houses, whose brown, sloping walls and low-beamed ceilings were very charming at first, but apt to become a trifle monotonous after a while. The sole amusements to be had were a chat about the weather and the fishing with one of the tanned, bushy-bearded, big-limbed giants upon the little beach, or a row in one of their stoutly-built boats. And in the evening there was nothing to do except read and play cards.

Those occupations can also grow monotonous when you have too much of them. Donald liked the chatting upon the beach, the sails in a fishy-smelling coble, the reading and card-playing in the quaintly-furnished parlour with the unevenly-built ceiling that always appeared to be meditating tumbling down upon his head. And above all he loved the solitude that gave him Madge's undivided society.

It had all been very delightful to Madge at first. The thorough change from the gaiety of London and the varied charms of house-parties was so great, that for a couple of months she was honest in her belief that Nature had intended her to lead a simple country life, and to go to bed at nine o'clock every evening, instead of seeking repose in the small hours of the

morning. She made fun of their limited accommodation, and declared that the brown earthenware teapot was infinitely preferable to a silver one, and she wondered why anyone had ever expended so much misplaced energy in inventing cruet-stands.

And then the delight of dressing in one's oldest clothes, and stretching out at full length upon the shingle without any dread of a dear but scandalized friend suddenly swooping down upon her! Madge wrote long letters at that happy period—letters that were filled with rapturous exclamations from beginning to end. She no longer wore veils, and she was quite careless of the sun's effect upon her beautiful complexion.

It came quite as a shock upon poor, contented Donald when he heard his wife declare for the first time that she loathed low ceilings, and had a firm conviction that the drains in the village were bad. And soon afterwards she discovered that brown earthenware teapots were very ugly, and that she detested anything of a makeshift kind upon a table.

Now, as their landlady's arrangements were of the most primitive order, Donald began to fear that Madge had suffered long and in silence. He sent to London for many trifles to brighten up the rooms, but Madge was still dissatisfied. Nothing pleased her. She wearied of everything, and cried a great deal when she was alone.

At that time her sister, the Hon. Mrs. Verlyn, was at Cannes, and she sent long glowing descriptions of the gorgeous scenery there, the flowers in the market,

and the charming people she met. It was then that Madge found her wardrobe to be incomplete, and filled the air with lamentations of her shabbiness, and the utter impossibility of procuring anything suitable without making a journey to London.

She wondered, also, why that dear but utterly idiotic Dr. Eager had not ordered Don to the Riviera. She was quite sure that the warm sunshine and exquisite scenery would do him good. Vic, her sister, wondered the same thing, and, then, so many of their acquaintances were there. It would be lovely to meet old faces again.

Don sighed, and resigned himself to the inevitable. He did not care to tell Madge that Dr. Eager had said that quiet was necessary for him. He was so afraid of being selfish that he consented to join Vic and her friends at Cannes. For, after all, one's wife ought not to suffer if you are sick, and Don felt now that his conduct in keeping Madge such a recluse had been egotistical.

So to Cannes they went, and rooms were procured in a large hotel that was filled with happy, healthy people, who made it a rule to look upon Don as belonging to them, and to treat him exactly as they treated their more robust friends.

'Stir him up!' Mrs. Verlyn advised her young sister. 'Don't let him mope alone in his room, or try his eyes over those dry-as-dust books that he is so fond of. It is the worst thing in the world for him. That is why so many people fancy themselves to be ill, because their friends foolishly encourage them in

the delusion. Make him meet people ; it is good for both of you.'

Poor Don did not share Madge's profound respect for Mrs. Verlyn's opinion. A woman may be the greatest authority living upon the set of a gown or the cut of a cloak, and yet be an utter baby in her ideas as to the management of a sick man. The very sound of Mrs. Verlyn's loud, strident tones, the aggressive rustling of her silk-lined garments, the odour of the perfume that she used, set Don's teeth on edge, and made him shiver. He always tried to be gay when she was near him. She had a way of looking indignant reproaches at him if he seemed dull or low-spirited in her presence. And whenever he coughed, she glanced compassionately at Madge and sighed.

'You must look after your own health, dear,' she said to Madge. 'Men get so selfish if women knuckle under too much to them. Show them that you respect yourself, and they will respect you in return. Give way to their caprice once, and you may do it always.'

This was apropos of a dance to which Madge had been invited, and felt that she ought to decline accepting because Don had passed a wakeful night, and looked ill in the morning.

Madge went to the dance after all. She was afraid of appearing weak in Vic's eyes. But her conscience must have reproached her, for she rushed home early, and went straight into Don's room, where he lay propped up with three or four pillows.

'Oh, Don dearest !' she cried, as she kissed his thin cheeks again and again.

That was all she said, but Don understood all that she felt.

They took him for long drives. He enjoyed them when Madge was alone with him. If she was in a particularly gentle mood, she allowed him to hold her hand, and fondle the little finger that bore his ring. Everything seemed beautiful then. Madge did not expect him to amuse her. She was quite content to talk to him about the beautiful scenery, the pretty villas, and other simple things. It was very different when Vic joined them, as she frequently did. Don dared not touch his wife's hand, for fear of being called sentimental, and he was compelled to show a decent amount of interest in the recent divorce case, or Mrs. Somebody's prodigious winnings at Monte Carlo, because if he did not Mrs. Verlyn thought him taciturn and grumpy.

And if he felt cold, and wanted the rug wrapped closer around him, she declared that he was coddling himself, and was not surprised that he coughed sometimes. It was most ridiculous for a man to wrap himself up in cotton-wool, she said. Don regretted the Cornish fishing village with a bitterness that grew deeper day by day. There he had felt himself to be in the bosom of Nature, and here everything seemed false and artificial. The sea-breezes were not so invigorating. They did not smell so briny, and he yearned for the quaint old parlour, and the restfulness that he had enjoyed.

But Madge was as much in her element as Don was out of his. Loving her husband dearly, she was yet

anxious for admiration. She went everywhere, and dressed in a manner that satisfied Mrs. Verlyn, who was ten times richer than Don, and who in consequence could indulge in many extravagant caprices that should have been out of Madge's power to fulfil.

'You have a lot of new gowns and things, haven't you, Madge?' Don asked one evening when she came into his room to be kissed and admired before going to the theatre.

She flushed. Tears of vexation crept into her eyes. At that time Madge was strangely sensitive.

'Not nearly so many as Vic,' she answered curtly.

Don pondered a moment, his sunken eyes roving over his wife's graceful figure and dainty little head. He saw that she wore a new diamond spray in the soft coils of her hair.

'Vic is rich,' he said. 'Verlyn left her a big fortune when he died.' He was about to add, 'Much more than I can leave you when I go.' He checked himself. Madge was frowning.

'It is not my fault if we are poor,' she said. 'And living here among so many smart people, I must dress decently. I can't wear the same things again and again.'

The next evening Don accompanied his wife to a dance. He hardly knew what he was afraid of. He felt that there were worse things in the world than death to separate people who love.

Mrs. Verlyn grew tired of Cannes. It was too full of invalids. It gave her the blues, she said, to see so many consumptive-looking people about. She spoke

before Don, giving him to understand that she did not consider him to be even ailing. So they went to Monte Carlo, and Don was expected to take his wife and her sister to the Casino whenever they felt desirous of going.

He grew to loathe the Casino. The bold-eyed, showily-dressed women parading up and down in the atrium, and the sound of money as it passed from hand to hand, filled him with a weary and sick impatience. He never saw anything to admire there. Everything seemed to be low, and base, and degrading.

Mrs. Verlyn had a dear friend staying at Monte Carlo. The dear friend was fond of betting, and knew more about horses than many men. She had been very lucky at the tables, and had won sufficient money in one week to keep a man and his family in simple comfort for a lifetime. Neither she nor Mrs. Verlyn had any necessity for making money. Yet to see them seated at the table, anxiously watching the ball as it raced round and round the roulette, to witness the eager delight with which they gathered up their winnings, and the hard despair with which they beheld the croupier rake away their stakes, one would have imagined them to have large and penniless families dependent upon their success at the table.

Don never knew how Madge first came to take her place by the croupier's side. He saw her there one evening, hard and flushed-looking, biting the point of a pencil, and knitting her brows over a long column of figures. It came upon him with a shock. Somehow

it seemed perfectly natural for Mrs. Verlyn and her friend to gamble. But Madge was different. Don went back to the hotel, and crawled painfully up to his room, feeling more weak and ill than he had ever felt since the doctor had cautioned him to avoid excitement, and had spoken disparagingly about his lungs.

'Something must be done,' he said to himself. 'She must not get like—like those other creatures, who are horrible travesties of women.'

The bedroom windows were wide open. Regardless of a mist that was gradually filling the streets, Don sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands.

He felt himself to be such a poor, weak thing, so unfit to have the charge of Madge, with her passionate love of life and gaiety, her impulsive nature, and the large stock of vanity that was chiefly the effect of her beauty. What was he but a clog upon her? Soon he might require care and nursing. How dared he expect Madge to shut herself up in a sick-room?

He was sitting in the same despondent attitude when Madge returned home. She had lost a great deal of money, and was not happy in consequence. At Don's first gentle remonstrance she broke out into a flood of angry and irritable words.

If he had been wise he would have made no further attempt just then to reason with her. But he was ill and heartsore, and when men and women are in that condition the tongue has a cruel trick of saying many bitter things that the heart grieves for later on.

Madge was offended. For the first time since they had been married they exchanged no good-night kiss.

And in the morning a doctor was hastily summoned to visit Don.

‘Oh, Don dear!’ Madge cried again in an agony of self-reproach, when the doctor had gone.

For a few days she was an exemplary nurse. Then Mrs. Verlyn took her to the Casino, and the former state of affairs recommenced.

Don gave up remonstrating with his wife. What good did it do? It only irritated her, and filled her with resentment.

‘It is nonsense to suppose that the poor dear child is to sit up here with you day after day,’ Mrs. Verlyn declared when Don ventured to speak to her of the subject that weighed down his heart. ‘I am sure that you don’t intend to be selfish. It is only your way to talk like that. You must remember that she is only twenty-three. No one would have imagined that you were going to be ill like this when the poor child married you. It is very hard upon her—very hard indeed!’

It was hard upon Don, too. But no one seemed to think of that. Only whenever Madge thought about him her heart would swell with pity and pain.

Don’s cough grew worse. He never complained. He had a morbid horror of being nursed by a strange woman. It was so pleasant in his room that he gradually ceased to leave it, and lay all day in a long chair by the window. Mrs. Verlyn said that he always seemed comfortable.

Madge went to the Casino every day. Sometimes she would pass the afternoon and evening there. If

she was lucky in the afternoon she returned to Don smiling, and was full of tender compassion for his sufferings and loneliness. If she lost she was sad and silent, and rushed away to the Casino immediately after dinner. Don grew at last to tell by the sound of her step upon the stairs whether she had been lucky or not.

One afternoon he begged her to stay with him. He felt restless, and did not like to be alone. Madge sat down by his side and let him hold her hand.

'We have been happy together, haven't we, darling?' he asked wistfully.

She was talking over a new system that she intended to work out later on in the day. She nodded her head, her mind occupied with calculations.

'You don't regret marrying me, do you, Madge?' he asked, in the same yearning tone.

She bent and kissed him then, his voice was so sad.

'I'm such an ailing chap,' he said. 'I think if we could only get back to Cornwall, darling, I might get stronger. Could you put up with Cornwall, dear?'

'Yes, yes, dear Don,' she answered, suddenly filled with remorse at her selfishness. 'We will go as soon as you can travel.'

He fell asleep soon after. Madge disengaged her hand. She was anxious to verify her system without delay. Creeping on tip-toe from the room, she put on her outdoor garments, and went into the Casino.

It was about two o'clock when she left her husband. The clock struck six as she gently opened his bedroom door. An odd stillness in the room struck

strangely upon her nerves as she entered. She was filled with elation. Her system had turned out a glorious success. She carried a bag filled with money in her hands.

‘Don, Don, I’ve won, I’ve won, dear!’ she cried.

There was no answer from the figure in the long chair. A cry broke from Madge’s lips as she bent over her husband. He lay upon his side with his hands stretched upwards, as though he had tried to push away something that pressed upon him. His eyes were fixed upon the doorway with an awful expression of frozen expectation in their depths. His mouth was contorted, and two drops of blood spotted one of his cuffs.

‘Don! Don!’ Madge screamed. ‘Don’t look like that! Don, my darling, speak to me—speak, dear!’

Still no answer. In terror she glanced towards the door. Who had he expected to see enter? Had it been the wife who was gambling not far from him, or was it that grim messenger, who had indeed entered to take Donald Charteris to another world?

Madge fell upon her knees by the dead man’s side. Her bag burst open, scattering a golden shower near her. She saw as plainly as though she had been present how her husband had fought with the awful shadow that, creeping slowly upon him, had at length won the battle. She saw how, when that black shadow had first entered the room, Don had looked towards the door, looked for the wife who was fighting with brain and soul for the possession of those coins that now lay like worthless objects upon the floor.

She heard him call her name, and then the maddening silence that followed. She knew that he had sobbed her name again, struggling with all his might to live until she returned to look once more upon her face. He had died alone ! Oh, false wife, false friend ! Was it thus that she had kept her marriage vows ?

‘ Don ! Don ! ’ she sobbed. ‘ I will be good, dear ! I will be good ! ’

He could not hear her. What mattered it now whether she were good or bad ?

A book lay open upon the bed. Madge’s eyes fell upon one line. It was marked with another of those dreadful red spots.

‘ In My Father’s house are many mansions ; if it were not so—— ’ She could read no farther. The red spot blurred the words that followed ; or was it the mist of remorseful tears before her eyes ?

THE END.

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